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# MEDIATED IDENTITY AND NEGOTIATED TRADITION:

# THE IÑUPIAQ ATIGI 1850-2000

A

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty
of the University of Alaska Fairbanks

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

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Fairbanks, Alaska

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## Abstract

The Iñupiaq parka and associated activities constitute an unbroken practice from the prehistoric to modern times. The overall form and use of the garment remains constant while materials and technology evolve. Iñupiaq parkas, often categorized as art because of their craft, creativity, and aesthetic appeal, also serve as tangible reminders of cultural abstractions. When considered within the age-old Iñupiaq subsistence system, the position of women and the role of parka sewing suggests that both are critical to the maintenance of the human/animal relationship central to Iñupiaq culture. The Iñupiaq parka is seen to mediate between the physical and spiritual relationship of humans and animals and, in contemporary times, to make tangible the dialectic between tradition and modernity that defines Iñupiaq identity today.

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## Acknowledgments

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## Preface: Catching Caribou and Shopping at Fred Meyer

*One realization I came to after a stint of fieldwork, (a late epiphany, but better late than never) is that there are really no answers–at least not in the sense of a final, provable solution. To think that there were ultimate answers is absurdly naive but somehow through years of course work and reading I've assumed that if I did enough fieldwork the answers would appear. Of course it's not that way at all. If anything, there are just more questions, ever more questions. The answers, better termed insights, surface out of the peculiar brew of questions, observations and experiences that blend in my mind. So, on a flight out of Nome, it became evident to me that critical ethnography, as opposed to descriptive, is a product of only one individual–the ethnographer. I could tell a story from another person's viewpoint but it ultimately remains my story, or at least, my construction of their story. I might, in an effort to convey multiple viewpoints, include lengthy statements of others–blocks or page of text, their words. In that case, though, I am still the collagist who decides what to include or omit and how to juxtapose those texts. The reader then becomes the ethnographer, left to interpret my arrangement of 'other's' texts. What to do?*

*For me the only logical solution is to go ahead and write from the viewpoint of me, the field ethnographer. I am the one who read the background material. I struggled with the theoretical questions. I flew to villages, talked to people, participated in festivals and funerals, ate maktak and watched out for polar bears. I am the one who has worked*

*to develop the distance to consider what I have seen–not with detachment or objectivity–but at least with a perspective informed by history, prehistory, physical environment, and other cultures–my own included. The answer must be mine, it is my question. This is a simplistic and perhaps unfashionable view of ethnography but it is the only one that feels real to me--real, honest, and useful. In the end I cannot escape my cultural milieu or my own personal perspective. The solution to postmodern angst is, for me, to be clear that I am writing from here, from myself, answering my own questions with answers that are my answers, not the answers, and certainly not the only answers.*

**A Beginning**

I am lucky to have lived in Alaska for over eight years. Living here is a bit like living in a foreign country without leaving home. Coming from the lower forty-eight, the land and people seem exotic and it is possible, for a time, to look at one's surroundings with a naive eye, the eye of an ignorant stranger in a curious and remote land. Mountains are huge and glacier draped, boats and float planes are as common as cars, wild animals and fish abound, and the summer sun circles the sky all day and all of what should be night.

My family and I arrived in Fairbanks in August of 1992 and set about becoming residents–finding a house and schools and figuring out how to be Alaskans. We learned to refer to the rest of the United States as 'outside', to not be surprised at

the absence of plumbing–even in town, or that as Fairbanksans we needed three plug-ins for our car in the winter: an engine block heater, a battery blanket and an oil pan heater. Soon after we arrived our neighbors gave us a very large whole salmon. I laid it across the top of our double sink and just stared at it until I summoned the courage to try to cut it up. I managed but it was a hack job and I swore to myself that, among other things, I would learn to cut fish. We outfitted our children for their soon-to-be sub-zero walks to the bus stop by purchasing felt lined Sorel boots, mittens, scarves, and parkas with hoods. We made ruffs to protect their faces out of a coyote pelt that we cut into strips and stitched together. My husband and I got parkas and boots for ourselves and made up an emergency kit for the car. We knew that the climate was not to be taken lightly and we tried to make sure that we were ready for it.

It was during this period, soon after I had arrived, that I first noticed the clothing that some of the Alaska Natives wore. Older women, in particular, wore distinctive hooded calico dresses over pants. These were made from brightly colored prints, were often trimmed with rickrack or bands of intricately patterned fabric, and had gathered or pleated skirts. As the seasons progressed and the cold weather set in I saw other Native people–both men and women–wearing handmade parkas designed for cold weather. Often made of corduroy or velveteen, the men's parkas were hip length and in solid colors. The women's were most often floral prints with

the same gathered skirts as the light-weight dresses. Most had elaborate bands of trim in colored geometric designs and were edged with fur trimming. I was curious and surreptitiously trailed people around the grocery store, trying to get a better look. Without actually stopping someone and asking about their parka, I could not make out the details. Since I had never seen such intricate trim designs for sale in fabric stores, I reasoned that they must be homemade but how they were constructed was beyond me. Large number of people wore these garments, and the obvious effort that had gone into making them demonstrated that they were an important and valued part of the wardrobe.

Later that first winter my job with the National Park Service took me to Anaktuvuk Pass, a small Iñupiaq Eskimo village tucked into a broad curving valley in the Brooks Range. About 250 people live in the village that was settled in 1950. Before then, these inland Iñupiat known as the Nunamiut were nomadic, moving from camp to camp as they took advantage of seasonal fishing and caribou hunting. The availability of a school and regular supply flights were the incentives for the permanent settlement. Several abandoned sod houses scattered around the village attest to the original housing style but all of the current residents live in frame houses complete with telephones, televisions and the ubiquitous CB radio. The village has a large school building with swimming pool and gym, a medical facility, a store, post office, and community center.

One evening I attended a cakewalk fundraiser at the community center. I wore a park service issue parka–warm but not at all attractive; it was olive green with a ratty coyote ruff. At the cakewalk I was surrounded by people wearing distinctive, beautiful parkas made of richly colored velveteen or corduroy. Young women carried babies in the backs of them, one older man cakewalked with his slung back on his shoulders, children ran in and out of the room in them, and parkas were piled high on the tables around the room. The scene was a flurry of prints, rickrack and luxurious fur ruffs–interspersed with the blue jeans, tee shirts and athletic shoes of ordinary attire. I introduced myself and joined a group of people watching from the side of the room. Everyone was friendly—a young boy offered me a cupcake. I finally took the opportunity to ask one of the women, Ada Lincoln, about her parka. Made from pink flowered calico, it had a band of matching geometric trim above the skirt. She allowed me to examine it and told me that her daughter, Vera Weber, had made it for her. Close to it I could see that the trimming was constructed from several colors of single-fold bias tape that were overlapped and stitched together. Ada said that the trim was called *qupak* and she described how it was made. She then introduced me to her husband, Gilbert, and her daughter, Vera, who was to figure prominently in my subsequent research.

Over time, on my return trips to Anaktuvuk Pass and the Lincoln family's trips to Fairbanks, we became friends. Vera, a skilled seamstress with a discerning eye for

color and design, taught me the essentials of Iñupiaq clothing. I also learned about other Iñupiaq traditions from Vera, Ada and their family, who welcomed me into their homes, fed me caribou, *maktak* (whale blubber), and salmonberries, tried to teach me to Eskimo dance and tolerated my incessant questions. I have come to deeply appreciate many aspects of Eskimo culture but, in the final analysis, what stands out in my memories is unfailing Iñupiaq good humor, openness, tolerance, and ability to laugh at themselves—a laughter that gathers you in, stranger or not, making you feel that you are welcomed into their lives.

In the past eight years my work has taken me to other Iñupiaq villages in northern and northwestern Alaska as well as to state-wide, national and international meetings, festivals and sports competitions in Anchorage and Fairbanks. During my travels the clothing that people wear has continued to fascinate me—in particular their strikingly beautiful and eminently functional parkas. I have delved into historical records and photo archives, trying to understand the origins of the garments and their evolution in design and meaning. It has been a rewarding endeavor that has illuminated the historical, social and political processes that have shaped contemporary Iñupiaq identity, and also the identities of other Native and non-Native groups in Alaska.

I have undertaken this project for several reasons. First, clothing, although often overlooked in cultural studies, is a window into the intricacies of cultural

change and adjustment, human relationships and the construction and maintenance of identity. Iñupiaq clothing traditions in the past 150 years attest to the significance of cultural values and meaning that might otherwise lie hidden beneath the homogeneous surface that Western industrialization and commoditization are constructing on a global scale. Secondly, Iñupiaq clothing, understood in its historical and cultural context, is tangible evidence of the continuing importance of subsistence relationships in Iñupiaq society. Subsistence (defined as the hunting, gathering, processing and sharing of products from the land), one of the most critically vital elements of Iñupiaq culture, is too easily equated with non-Native sport hunting and fishing. An investigation into the role of clothing in Iñupiaq culture exposes the underlying spiritual, moral, familial and social foundations of Iñupiaq subsistence practices and repudiates any assumptions that subsistence is an anachronistic or trivial practice. I began to get an inkling of this when Vera told me one day that one of her older uncles had finally asked her to make him a parka. Her pleasure in his request helped me realize that she felt that she had 'proved herself' in an important way. His request seemed almost a rite of passage for her, an indication she had achieved the status of adult Iñupiaq seamstress and could participate in the intricate sharing system that characterizes so much Iñupiaq social exchange.

## Chapter 1: The Iñupiaq Atigi, Problem and Approach

### Introduction

The distinctive, functional clothing of the Iñupiaq Eskimo people in northern Alaska is rooted in the historic and prehistoric past. Archaeological sites and historical collections reveal clothing traditions that uniquely marked Iñupiaq identity and demonstrated ingenious use of local resources. As contact with Euroamerican cultures increased in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Iñupiat incorporated non-indigenous materials, tools and techniques into their clothing production processes. By the 1940s parka materials had almost completely transformed from caribou skin to a combination of cloth and commercial sheepskin (mouton) or quilted polyester lining material. Some details of the garment's form and decoration changed with these new materials and tools, but overall parka design remained much the same as it had been in the middle 1800s.

Contemporary Iñupiaq seamstresses continue to make parkas in these old patterns today, and the parkas continue to function in many of the same ways as they have for at least 150 years. In the rapidly globalizing 21st century where people have easy access to a wide range of manufactured goods, the retention of Iñupiaq parka design, construction and use reflects the resiliency and adaptability of Iñupiaq social

system and culture. Parkas are more than instrumentally functional garments–Iñupiaq parkas embody values that are fundamental elements of Iñupiaq social structure. The continuity of the garment itself speaks eloquently of the enduring relevance of Iñupiaq culture. The transformation of parka materials and styles over time reflects the accommodations that the Iñupiat made in response to the influx of Western influences but does not diminish the garment's cultural significance.

In this dissertation I will explore the role of clothing as a contemporary expression of Iñupiaq values and of changing dimensions of Iñupiaq identity. I hope to demonstrate that the continuing construction and use of parkas is linked to Iñupiaq subsistence values which are, in turn, the basis of Iñupiaq family and community social structures. Although styles and materials have varied over the last 150 years, the practice of constructing clothing, particularly forms of 'traditionally' styled outerwear, continues in Iñupiaq culture. I argue that the core values that drive this clothing tradition remain intact and functioning within Iñupiaq society at the same time that clothing is used in new contexts. I will investigate the symbolic connections between clothing and Iñupiaq values and will analyze how parkas mediate individual, village, and regional identity in various social contexts. By documenting changes in parka design and construction since 1850 and correlating those changes with introduced ideas, economies, materials and technology, I will

examine the dynamic between tradition and innovation in Iñupiaq clothing and attempt to identify the factors that sustain the cultural significance of the garments.

**Method**

My study has two primary goals. The first is to explore the relationship between tradition and innovation as illustrated by changes in Iñupiaq clothing design, construction, and use. The second goal is to investigate the role of Iñupiaq clothing in expressing Iñupiaq identity and maintaining the subsistence-based Iñupiaq social structure during the past 150 years, exploring changes in parka materials, design and construction as they paralleled changes in Iñupiaq sociocultural environment that occurred with increasing Euroamerican influences. Achieving these goals requires understanding the Iñupiaq way of life both before and during contact with Euroamericans; an examination of the relationships among the various Iñupiaq groups (or nations, as Burch (1998) describes) and between Iñupiaq people and other Native groups in Alaska, Canada, and Siberia; documentation of changes in Iñupiaq clothing materials, design, construction and use through time; and, finally, an assessment of how the Iñupiat have employed the processes of ethnicity and tradition to maintain their cultural identity. This has involved both field and archival research.

I have gathered information on three levels: 1) library, archive, and museum research, 2) formal and informal interviews with Iñupiaq seamstresses and their families, and 3) participant observation in family, community and regional activities.

The significance of Iñupiaq parkas to the Iñupiat must be understood within the context of the socioeconomic and ideological framework of Iñupiaq life. The temporal scope of this study dictates the use of historical and ethnohistorical sources and museum collections for information about people and clothing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as well as contemporary ethnography. I have acquired data on parkas from earlier periods from historical photographs, published and unpublished sources, and from garments preserved in museum collections. In addition to standard ethnographic literature, I have found information in oral histories and memoirs of Iñupiaq people, and of Euroamerican whalers, traders, teachers, and missionaries who worked in Alaska in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

I have investigated Iñupiaq clothing in the collections of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec, the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., the National Museum of the American Indian in New York City, the Burke Museum in Seattle, the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, and the

University of Alaska Museum in Fairbanks. I have combined detailed construction and materials data from these garments with information about historic clothing use from photographs in historic photograph collections and other archival material such as teachers' and missionaries' journals and letters. The archival sources are critical for documenting clothing changes after Euroamerican contact resulted in the incorporation of non-indigenous materials since many of the ethnographers who collected for museums did not collect clothing or other objects that included non-indigenous materials because of concerns about authenticity. I have used the photograph and archival collections at the Bancroft Library at University of California, Berkeley; the Iñupiat History, Language and Culture Commission in Barrow, AK; the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec; the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.; the Anchorage Museum of History and Art; the Allen Library Special Collections at the University of Washington in Seattle, WA; Parks Canada archives in Whitehorse, Yukon Territories, and the Simon Paneak Memorial Museum in Anaktuvuk Pass, Alaska.

I have gathered information on contemporary Iñupiaq society and clothing through interviews and participant observation in Iñupiaq villages including of Barrow, Kotzebue, Nome, Kaktovik and Anaktuvuk Pass. In addition I have interviewed residents from Kiana, Kobuk, Ambler and Selawik. I identified informants

through elder councils, village councils and my own acquaintances made when working in the villages. Identification of one seamstress leads to others since women in the villages are very aware of who else sews. I conducted formal, structured interviews to explore topics of family origins and relationships, personal history, and parka design, construction and use. Using photographs and actual parkas as mnemonic devices, I recorded initial responses and then asked seamstresses to describe the components of parka and parka trim designs that are village- or region-specific. I interviewed members of the seamstresses' families to explore their use and perceptions of locally made parkas in contrast with commercially made outerwear. I talked to both older and younger seamstresses to take into account generational differences in sewing practices and clothing preferences. I investigated connections between Iñupiaq parkas and subsistence values through formal and informal interviews with hunters as well as with the women who construct the garments.

I gathered information informally during special events in northern Alaskan villages and cities, including parka parades and competitions where I was one of the judges. I did not gather systematic data at these times but I noted relevant information as it appeared in the course of conversation or activities. Although unstructured, these data are critical because they illuminate the day to day practices

of people that, unconsciously acted, are not necessarily accessible through formal interviews.

**Research Scope/Relationship to Previous Research**

The geographic scope of this research includes the area of North America that is home to the north Alaskan Iñupiat people. This region extends west from the Mackenzie River Delta in western Canada, across Alaska to the Bering Sea (figure 1). The northern boundary is the coast of the Arctic Ocean and the southern boundary is the north shore of Norton Sound. It is impossible to investigate the entirety of this expansive area, but historic records and collections of clothing and other artifacts exist for many locations within this region, making it possible to achieve some understanding of Iñupiaq life during the last 150 years. My research focuses on historic and contemporary times. Earlier than that, the evidence is limited to artifacts and contextual interpretations from archaeological investigations. Clothing, fragile and organic, is not often preserved in archaeological sites, although there are a few instances in northern Alaska, Canada and Greenland (Mason, et al. 1991, Maxwell 1984, Bergland 1986). Some information about prehistoric clothing may be gleaned from tool analysis and artistic depictions on carvings but details of design, construction, practice and meaning are not usually accessible.

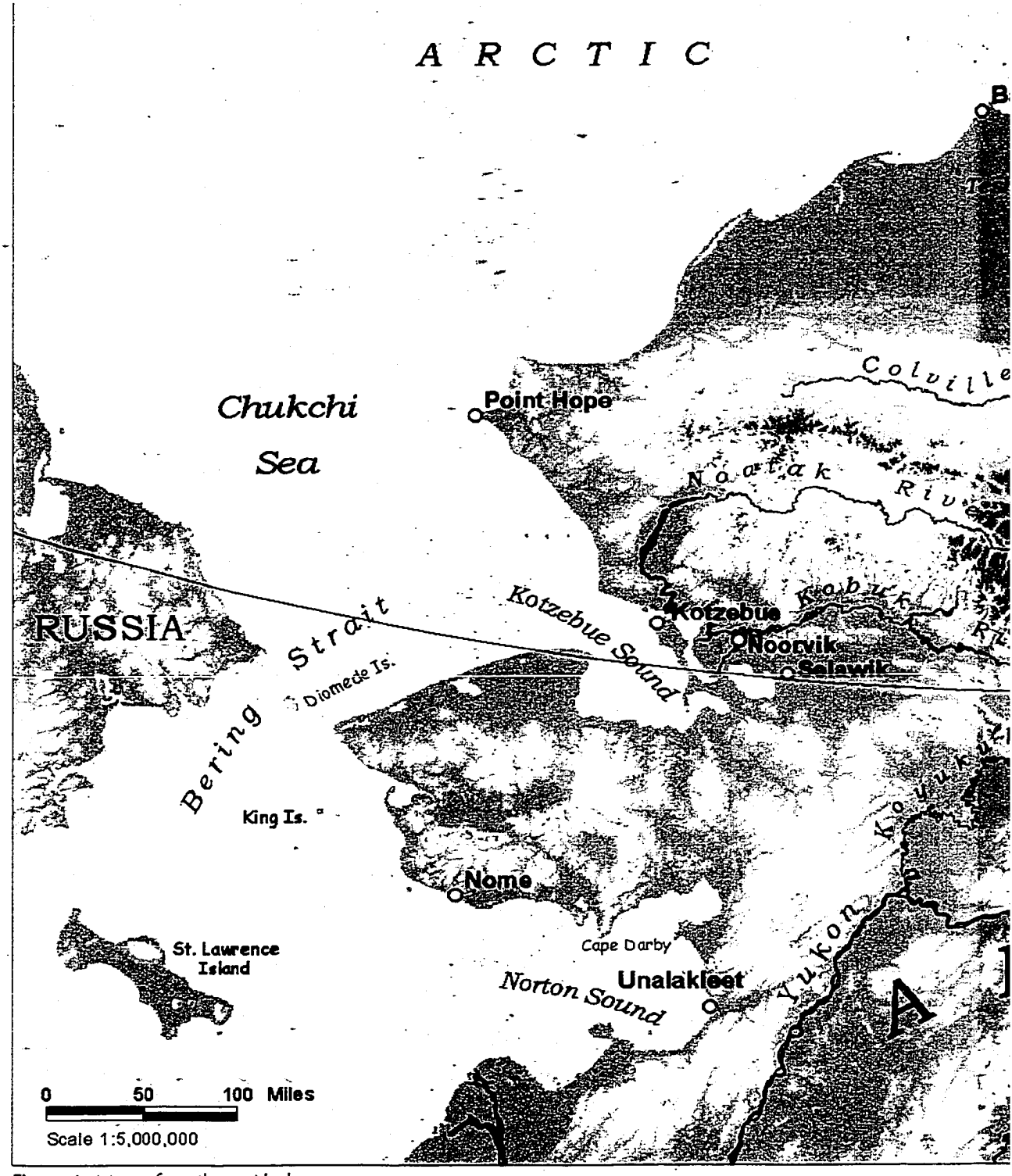
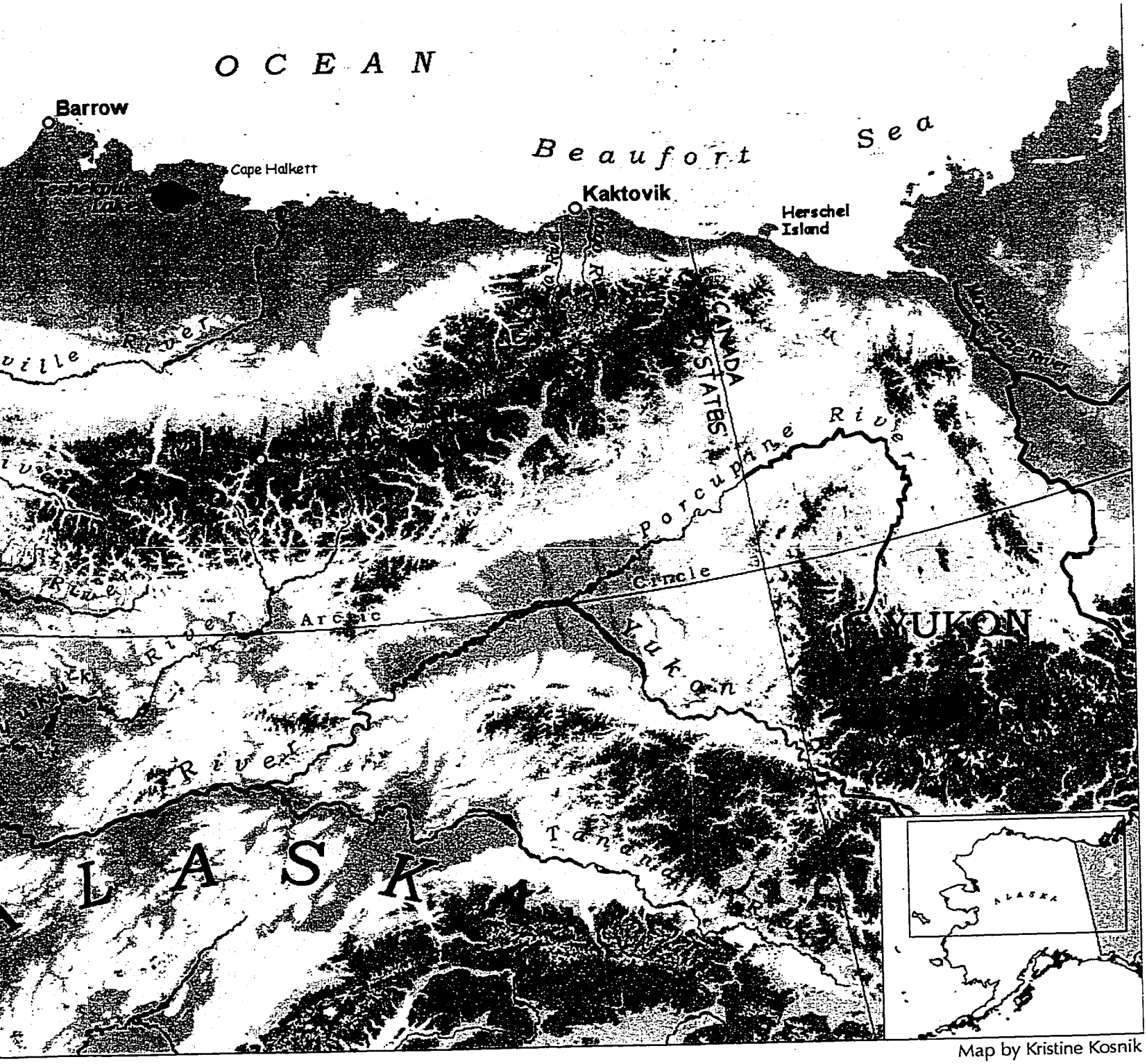



Figure 1. Map of northern Alaska




Map by Kristine Kosnik

Beginning in the middle nineteenth century, explorers, whalers, traders, and a few ethnographers recorded information about the people of northern Alaska. The earliest detailed account of the Iñupiat Eskimo people is John Simpson's (1988[1855]) monograph written during his tour of duty with Captain Rochfort Maguire at Point Barrow from 1852-53. Simpson, a medical doctor, recorded his observations of settlements, trading places, subsistence activities, physical characteristics of the people, dress, social structure of the family and village, and described some myths and the treatment of the dead. Another important early ethnographic account is Nelson (1983[1899]), based on his experiences living in the St. Michael area from 1877-81. Nelson's work includes some information from as far north as Point Barrow but most of his work focuses on the Yup'ik people living in western Alaska on the deltas of the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers. Nelson provides contextual information as well as descriptions of material culture, including clothing.

The most complete ethnographic record of the material culture of northern Alaskan Iñupiat in the nineteenth century is John Murdoch's *Ethnological Results of the Point Barrow Expedition* (1988[1892]). Murdoch, a naturalist on the International Polar Expedition to Point Barrow, Alaska, 1881-1883, wrote a detailed description of the ethnographic collections made during the expedition. Murdoch's study is the only major ethnographic account of Iñupiaq culture during the 1800s. He observed and

recorded the technology and material culture of the Iñupiaq people. Although the collection and account do not include objects that evidenced contact with western culture, they describe a broad assortment of manufacturing and hunting equipment and a selection of articles of clothing. The collection does not include many ceremonial objects because the Iñupiat had been in contact with the whalers for thirty years and many of their religious and social practices were changing. Murdoch did not collect items whose construction or meaning were influenced by Euroamerican culture, deeming them inauthentic.

Cantwell (1884), of the Revenue Marine Steamer Corwin, recorded his observations of the Native people in the vicinity of the Kobuk, Noatak, and Selawik rivers when he was dispatched to survey the area and search for a jade deposit in 1885. Cantwell's narrative provides information in categories such as government, diseases, funeral ceremonies, clothing, and transportation. He writes casually and subjectively, making no attempt to maintain a scientific or objective point of view but providing interesting information on a previously undescribed group.

Other ethnographic accounts that provide valuable information about the northern Alaskan Eskimo are Diamond Jenness (1922, 1953, 1957, 1962) and Vilhjalmur Stefansson (1914). Stefansson's work was based on his experiences on the

Stefansson-Anderson Arctic Expedition of the American Museum of Natural History, and both Stefansson and Jenness participated in the Canadian Arctic Expedition 1913-18. Stefansson observed Inuit groups, culture and language across Canada and northern Alaska. In addition to making formal scientific observations as part of the expedition, Jenness lived and traveled with Iñupiat people along the northern coast of Alaska. His observations and first-hand experiences of year-round daily life in the early twentieth century are invaluable records of the yearly round of the Iñupiat in northern Alaska.

More contemporary ethnographies or studies with ethnographic components are Burch (1975), Chance (1966, 1990), Rainey (1947), Ray (1975), Spencer (1959), and VanStone (1962). Rainey's account is based on nearly a year's residence in the village of Point Hope and discusses the social structure and the economy and subsistence cycle of the Point Hope people in the nineteenth century, finishing with a description of the contemporary people of the time. Spencer's ethnography reflects more contemporary anthropological concerns and deals with social structure, changes due to an introduced cash economy and the influence of the commercial whaling industry. Spencer investigates the relationship between society and economy and how that relationship differs in coastal and inland Iñupiat groups.

The earliest major work on arctic clothing is Hatt's (1969[1914]) classic *Arctic Skin Clothing in Eurasia and America: An Ethnographic Study*. Hatt analyzes clothing materials and forms and documents their distribution across the north. More recent general surveys of northern clothing include Chaussonnet (1988, 1995) and Issenman (1985). Descriptions and illustrations of the clothing of some Siberian peoples are found in Bogoras (1904) and Jochelson (1908). A relatively rich literature exists for Canadian Inuit clothing (Driscoll 1980,1983; Hall, Oakes and Webster 1994; Issenman 1997; Oakes 1987, 1988; and Oakes and Riewe 1995) but there is no corresponding corpus for Alaskan Eskimo clothing. Wilder (1976) describes construction techniques for several articles of clothing. Foote (1992) includes clothing patterns and descriptions in her detailed description of life in the village of Point Hope from 1959 to 1961. Ray (1977, 1996) provides some general information about Iñupiaq clothing. She describes the role of skin clothing in trade and as a market item in the first part of the twentieth century and documents some of the history of the Nome Skin Sewers Cooperative, which provided a commercial outlet for Iñupiaq women's sewing products for twenty years beginning in 1940. No comprehensive study of Alaskan Iñupiaq clothing exists at the present time.

Nearly all of the accounts of northern clothing are descriptive; some include discussions of manufacturing techniques and materials. Most focus almost exclusively

on hand sewn skin garments, neglecting contemporary clothing styles that are made and worn for everyday purposes. Although some researchers (Driscoll 1983, Oakes 1987 and 1988) mention contemporary clothing and social contexts, none examine the intricately linked historical and social processes (e.g. trade, economic and political forces, diffusion of ideas and techniques) that influenced the development of the clothing and the resulting role of clothing in Iñupiaq life.[1]

## Ethnicity and Tradition: A Theoretical Discussion

*...the analysis of a particular culture cannot focus on cultural objects or goods; it must concern itself with the process of production and social circulation of objects and meanings that different recipients attribute to them.*

*—Nestor Garcia Canclini*

In this research I investigate the phenomenon of clothing in a particular cultural context, but the theoretical issues of tradition and identity are central to the investigation and should be considered before more particular questions are

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1

Why clothing has been neglected as a topic of investigation in Alaska is an interesting question. It may be that researchers were attracted to the topic of Canadian Inuit clothing because of the array of styles exhibited by the different groups across Canada. That stylistic variety is not found in Alaska since Iñupiat and Yup'ik are the only Eskimo groups and their clothing styles are relatively similar, especially in contemporary times.

addressed. The concept of tradition[2] developed from a post-Enlightenment European world view and was exported to colonial situations where it played an important role in the colonists' coming to terms with the Other. Ultimately, the concept of tradition was internalized by colonized peoples who use(d) it in struggles for independence and nationalism (Horner 1990, Shils 1981). In Africa, Natives quickly realized that tradition was valued by British colonists. They couched solutions to problems in the guise of traditional rules to gain British approval (Colson 1974). The view of tradition as inherently political illustrates Horner's argument that "tradition is selective re-creation based in ideological concerns"(Horner 1990:41) and that it is both processual and contextual. The process of selectivity and renewal that is tradition is directly tied to specific social and political contexts. The processual and contextual facets influence each other in a dynamic manner. Shils (1981) and Handler and Linnekin (1984) address the development of the concept of tradition while Borofsky (1987) and Clifford (1988) critique its use in constructing synchronic ethnographic vignettes that have contributed to anthropology's tendency to view indigenous groups as cultural isolates, frozen in time and space.

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2

Definitions of 'tradition' fall into two categories: weak and strong. Weakly defined, tradition is seen as a survival of some aspects of a past, an "inert, historicized segment" (Williams 1977:115) or an inherited body of customs and beliefs (Handler and Linnekin 1984). In a stronger sense, tradition is an interpretive process, an active force that shapes past and present through a process of social and cultural definition (Handler and Linnekin 1984, Williams 1977).

Also central to my argument is the concept of ethnicity, a particular category of identity that like the concept of tradition, has processual and contextual aspects. Ethnicity is defined as a form of social organization in which ethnic groups are identified by self-ascription and ascription by others (Barth 1969). In situations of self-ascription, the group's boundaries and continuity are maintained by whatever features the members of the group consider critical. The symbolic nature of boundary-marking features has been investigated by many anthropologists (e.g., Bennett 1975, Cohen 1986, Geertz 1973, Melucci 1989, Spicer 1980 and Turner 1967). Cohen (1986, 1987) is especially useful in considering contemporary expressions of identity. In his research in the British Isles he shows that the "veneer of homogeneity" created by modern communications and transportation systems must not be confused with a homogenization of meaning. People maintain their sense of difference through symbolic responses that derive from shared knowledge of people and places. Expressions of identity are directly related to constructions of tradition, and both are contingent upon specific individual, social and political circumstances. In my investigation into Iñupiaq clothing practices, I explore the relationship between the meaning clothing has for individuals and the meaning that it holds as an indicator of group membership. Clothing mediates between the individual and the social, as well as physical, environment. As a highly visible expression of individual and group

identity, clothing is tied to cultural standards and is an ideal medium through which to investigate identity and tradition.

Ethnicity and tradition are similar in that each has been viewed as a static, bounded attribute of human groups. Ethnicity has been tied to race and tradition to cultural history–people were thought to be born with their ethnicity and into their history–neither was negotiable. Both concepts have been tools in the hands of European imperialism and colonial expansion. They were exported to colonial settings and imposed on the local residents. Once in place, however, the colonized people adopted the concepts and turned them to political advantage. Anthropologists studying these phenomena, primarily from the Western colonizing nation's point of view, at first depicted ethnicity and tradition in the commonly accepted static and bounded sense. Finally, though, through the persistent refusal of colonized peoples to be subsumed within externally imposed national identities, they developed clearer conceptualizations of ethnicity and tradition. At least in the social science community, ethnicity and tradition came to be seen as fluid, often self-defined characteristics assigned and manipulated by the groups in question rather than static, ascribed categories that froze people and cultures into unchanging ethnographic pasts or presents. Studies of ethnicity and tradition are useful in exploring how groups

of people and individuals strategically position themselves within the hegemonies of the larger world.

The terms ethnicity and tradition are used uncritically in common language as well as in the social sciences and have acquired multiple meanings that confuse their analytical utility. An ethnic group is often seen as the 'other' within a nation-state and tradition is usually situated in opposition to modernity. Both are used as synonyms for custom, culture, and social heritage. For example, members of ethnic groups such as Blacks are often identified through certain cultural stereotypes in food, dress and language that are assumed to be inherited traditions from a tribal African past. Just as ethnicity carries racial overtones, tradition carries assumptions of authenticity–an inviolate link to the past. These confusions of meaning suggest the concepts are less than useful as analytical tools, however, their chameleon-like natures can be a way of understanding some critical social processes.

People use ethnicity and tradition to construct identity–both individual and group–for themselves and others. Although used for political ends, ethnicity and tradition are often expressed in the cultural domain. Styles of clothing, types of food, musical or artistic expression often serve as symbols or boundary markers for group identification. To understand how ethnicity and tradition construct and maintain

identity it is useful to review their evolution–first as concepts within the framework of anthropology and sociology, and second as tools in the hands of some of those whom social scientists study. I will address each in turn and then consider how they operate in tandem.

**Ethnicity: Concept and Process**

The concept of ethnicity was identified when anthropologists began to investigate smaller groups within larger nation-states. Ethnicity was initially a way to distinguish minority group differences from the majority population within a given national setting. The concept of ethnicity, like that of culture, has been malleable, defying ultimate definition and often taking on the meanings through general usage in culture or, sometimes, in the discipline of anthropology (R. Cohen 1978, Glazer and Moynihan 1975). Ethnicity and culture are overarching concepts that encompass attributes of individual and collective social life, and are seemingly so self-evident that they have passed into common use. Anthropologists, during the past three decades, have recognized the complexity of the concept of ethnicity and have struggled to refine it into a more critical and theoretical framework. Originally, the concept was

predicated on a model of ethnic groups as static, bounded entities existing within larger, generally dominant societies, e.g. European immigrant groups in the United States, or indigenous Indians in Spanish Mexico, but anthropologists gradually recognized that this model was too limiting (Barth 1969, Vincent 1974). Ethnicity became understood as a process and strategy by which people create and maintain identity in multicultural situations.

**Defining Ethnicity**

The linguistic root of ethnicity is *ethnos*, a Greek term meaning race or people. It reveals one of the early assumptions of its use--that ethnicity was defined by the racial and cultural attributes of a particular group. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, David Riesman first coined the term in 1953, although Sollors notes that W. Lloyd Warner used it in 1941 in *The Social Life of a Modern Community* (Sollors 1989, Glazer and Moynihan 1975). During the 1960s ethnicity found its way into *Webster's Third New World Dictionary* and, by 1973, was defined in the *American Heritage Dictionary* as "the condition of belonging to a particular ethnic group". Anthropologists such as Glazer and Moynihan heralded it as a new phenomenon, saying that it was "...an emergence of a new social category as significant for the understanding of the present-day world as that of social class itself"

(1975:3). This 'new category' was actually anthropologists' reworked understanding of the tribes or cultures that persisted within nation-states. They defined an ethnic group as, "a group with a common cultural tradition and a sense of identity which exists as a subgroup of a larger society" (Theodorson 1969, in Glazer and Moynihan 1975). Once thought to be a 'survival' of a primitive society, it had been assumed that such ethnic groups would disappear as they were assimilated into the larger entity. These ideas were congruent with the thrust of anthropology at the time, which was dedicated to the understanding of non-Western societies as primitive, unchanging isolates (Borofsky 1994, R. Cohen 1978). Additionally, ethnic groups were assumed to be differentiated by physical characteristics or race and occupying marginal and minority positions (R. Cohen 1978, Despres 1975, Nash 1989). By the 1950s and 1960s, however, anthropologists recognized that ethnic groups survived despite the threat of assimilation and that they were viable entities capable of renewing themselves (Glazer and Moynihan 1975). Further, they saw that the definition of the group did not necessarily rely on shared physical characteristics or ancestry although these could be components of a group's definition.

This realization—that groups persist, that they maintain their identities within larger societies and that members are active players in defining and maintaining those identities—is one of the most important shifts of anthropological thought of the

1950s and 60s. Instead of considering cultural groups as small-scale entities existing within delineated boundaries, they realized that they were interactive parts of larger complex societies. Thus, in the discipline of anthropology, a static, structural view of culture gave way to a processual approach that acknowledged the organic, 'becoming' nature of social/cultural phenomenon (Borofsky 1994). The objectified concept of 'a culture' with closed boundaries was challenged and replaced with a model of culture as process.

The processual view of ethnicity as subject to history and dependent upon particular variables permits investigation into the circumstances of the development and maintenance of difference. Variable and contingent rather than similarly constituted throughout human groups, ethnicity moves from the realm of static 'given' into that of empirical analysis. Instead of describing a group's difference within a timeless, geographically bounded ethnographic present, the study of ethnicity investigates the conditions determining the development, definition, maintenance and utility of difference, and recognizes individual group members as active participants in the process.

**Boundaries and Markers**

If not static, how then is a group defined and how does it maintain its existence as a separate entity? Early models of ethnicity were based on sociological ideas about ethnic groups. Talcott Parsons (1975) defines ethnicity as "...the primary focus of group identity; the organization of plural persons into distinctive groups and, second of solidarity and the loyalties of individual members to such groups." An ethnic group's sense of distinctive identity is based on its members' sense of shared history and relies also on a sense of belonging that is transmitted transgenerationally. This harkens back to Weber's definition of ethnic groups as, "those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of philosophy, type of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration..."(Weber 1968:389). Weber's subjective nature of belief is defining, whereas the origin of the belief in shared customs or descent is not. Any differences such as food, dress, language, or descent can express group relationships. According to Weber, "...the similarity and contrast of physical type and custom, regardless of whether they are biologically inherited or culturally transmitted, are subject to the same conditions of group life, in origin as well as effectiveness, and identical in their potential for group formation" (Weber 1968:388). What is critical for the purposes of my research in Iñupiaq clothing are the perceptions of group members that they are

distinct and different from non-members and that this distinction is maintained by whatever criteria the group defines as significant.

Barth (1969) expands on Weber's ideas, noting that ethnic groups are not culture-bearing units as defined by traditional anthropology, but are instead a form of social organization. According to Barth, the earlier definition of ethnicity relies on shared cultural values, a biologically self-perpetuating population, a common field of interaction, and member and non-member recognition. It assumes that maintenance of the group boundaries occurs because of the isolation implied by racial, language and cultural dissimilarities (e.g.Narroll 1964). These ideas are flawed, says Barth, because they do not take into account the ability of group traits to change over time or space without altering the basic existence of the group. Instead, he asserts that ethnic groups are a form of social organization identified by self-ascription and ascription by others. Cultural features such as language and custom *may* come into play but there is no direct relationship between the ethnic unit and cultural traits. The most critical element is self-ascription; only the differences or features that group members themselves consider significant are salient to group formation. With this in mind, it can be seen that the group's continuity depends on boundary maintenance by use of whatever features the members of the group consider critical. "Cultural features might change and cultural characteristics of members may change but

continuing dichotomization between members and others allows us to specify the nature of continuity and investigate changing cultural form and content"(Barth 1969:204). Essential to my study is Barth's identification of group boundary maintenance as the critical area of inquiry in investigation of ethnic phenomenon.

Barth's emphasis on boundary markers underscores their symbolic nature. Geertz (1973) joins culture and symbols, arguing that people maintain their cultural values through public symbols and that symbols are vehicles for culture. His understanding of ethnicity must include an investigation of the symbols used to maintain ethnic boundaries and, most importantly, an understanding of the context of those symbols. As he notes, "...culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institution, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly–that is, thickly–described" (Geertz 1973:14).

The symbolic nature of boundary markers is important to my argument because of the role clothing plays as a symbol of identity. Clothing is often the most visible marker of ethnicity. Ethnic markers may change through time, but pre-existing cultural traditions are often still the basis for ethnic identity. Bennett (1975) describes the symbolic construction of identity as a totality of pre-existing cultural forms. He defines ethnicity as " the cognitive or conscious construction of an identity for the

individual and the group out of traditional cultural symbols"(1975:6). Melucci, studying nationalist movements, agrees, noting that ethno-nationalist movements often base their action on cultural groups, co-opting group's symbols (based on language, culture and an ancient history) for national identities. The revival of ethnicity as a source of identity in complex societies provides individuals with a form of membership and identification that is lacking in the mass culture of complex societies (Melucci 1989). This is evident in northern Alaska where emphasis on Native identity is increasing.

The cultural traditions used to construct identity need not be 'real' but may be partly or entirely fabricated. Whalens (1973) illustrates this in his examination of the identity of Virginia City, Nevada residents. Their identity, strongly felt and acted upon, is marked by cultural traditions adopted from the fictional accounts of life in the 'Old West' as portrayed on television and in motion pictures. The idea of such invented traditions is expanded by Hobsbawm who notes:

> 'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past [Hobsbawm 1983:1].

The relationship with the past, actual or invented, lends authenticity to a group's claims and connects them with not only the current members of their group but also with members of the group in the actual or mythological past. Hobsbawm's statement is also interesting because he speaks of ritual or symbolic practices that 'seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior.' This corresponds to Leach's (1976) ideas about the dual role of symbols; they both communicate (in a metaphoric sense) and *do* something (in an active sense). The symbolizing role does not stand alone but is combined with intent. These ideas are useful in investigating the role of clothing in Iñupiaq culture where garments operate as metonyms, metaphors and active agents.

Invention notwithstanding, the set of symbols and associated meanings that a group develops in response to their shared experience often constitutes the key to their collective identity (Spicer 1980). Language, way of life, and residence in a homeland are elements that may contribute to the nature of the symbols that constitute a group's identity but are not essential to the symbolic system. Several types of symbol sets are critical to the maintenance of a people's identity. These include ethnic terminology, words a group uses for themselves and for other groups; geographic locations or placenames associated with the group (regardless of actual

physical contact with the places); sacred laws, a set of symbols that stands for the order of human life that is acceptable to the group; and expressive culture--certain dances, songs, art or clothing that characterize only that particular group. Spicer comments on the symbols that constitute and maintain a group's identity, "Each symbol employed in an identity system is, for those most deeply versed in the meanings, an expression of the significance of their own lives and of those who have gone before" (Spicer 1980:360).

Hensel , writing about subsistence practices in southwestern Alaska, notes the role of a common discourse in defining group identity. He argues that the shared language of subsistence, the ongoing discourse about subsistence activities in the area, is the defining element of identity in the region, signaling cultural affiliation. He notes that ethnicity is "a constantly negotiated and reenacted identity" (1996: 14). Geertz, too, writes of the meanings that are 'stored' in symbols, saying:

> Such religious symbols, dramatized in rituals or related in myths, are felt somehow to sum up, for those for whom they are resonant, what is known about the way the world is, the quality of the emotional life it supports, and the way one ought to behave while in it [Geertz 1973:127].

Again, as with Leach and Hobsbawm, we see Geertz portraying symbols as active, able to influence the behavior of those who receive their messages. If symbols communicate and maintain group identity, and influence behavior, how does a symbolic system relate to individuals–in expressing identity and allowing for creativity?

Individual agency also influences the operation of ethnicity for it is through the individual's claim that ethnicity retains its currency. Anthony Cohen, working with the residents of Whalsay, one of the Shetland Islands, addresses the relationship between symbolism and ethnicity but his work removes the focus from the group as the arbiter of culture and subject of study and designates the individual as an active participant in defining his own culture (cf. Geertz 1973, Goodenough 1994, Levy 1994). Cohen notes that a critical issue is to understand "...how individuals resolve the contending claims of individuality and communality" (Cohen 1987:210). He also calls attention to the appearance of cultural similarity that has been created by the globalization and the dominance of western culture. He notes that within communities existing as part of industrialized mass society, symbolic and pragmatic behavior often appear to be the same on the surface but that individuals and groups maintain their distinctive identities through the meanings that they give to their

behaviors. Whalsay residents are impassioned in their defense of their fishing rights, for example, because fishing is so central to their identity. In spite of the superficial appearance of similarity to off-island fishing communities, islanders occupy their own worlds of significance. They maintain those worlds through distinctive construction of meanings (Cohen 1987).

Where structural boundaries of groups isolated by distance, language or custom formerly allowed them to maintain a sense of identity, now the particular or local symbolic meaning given to seemingly more universal forms preserves community identity. Cohen (1987) notes that fiddle music in Whalsay could be assumed to be part of a general British folk music revival but in the case of Whalsay, local fiddle performances evoke Whalsay's past and perpetuate the residents' image of themselves. Local meaning given to the music marks community and social boundary. Symbolic forms are significant for individuals as well as groups and their meanings vary according to each individual's construction. This multi-valent characteristic gives the symbols their efficacy; common forms may be preserved as group symbols while at the same time signifying different meanings for each individual. "Symbols, being malleable in this way, can be made to 'fit' circumstances. They thus provide media through which individuals and groups can experience and

express their attachment to a society without compromising their individuality" (Cohen 1986:9).

**Ethnicity As a Tool**

Both individuals and groups use ethnicity to their political and economic benefit. Group action may make social changes possible where individual action would have no effect. According to Glazer and Moynihan:

> Different groups *do* have different norms...the unsuccessful group has the best chance of changing the system if it acts *as a group*. It is *as a group* that its struggles are not just negative but also positive--not just against some other group's norms but in favor of the already established norms of its own [Glazer and Moynihan 1975:15].

Ethnicity is a tool,"...a device, a strategy for achieving what one wants and needs...a device for political assertion, a means for obtaining votes or favors"(Bennett 1975:7). The tool may be used in different ways at different times by the same group; its use is dictated by context.

The contingent nature of ethnicity complements its politically efficacy. As a tool for advancing individual and group goals, ethnicity depends upon the particular circumstances of the time and place of its mobilization. There is not necessarily just

one ethnic identity for an individual, a single person can fit various identities according to different criteria of relevance in different situations (Handleman 1977). The situation also determines what elements make up a group's identity. The content of any group's or individual's definition of their identity is determined both structurally and culturally in relation to the 'other' and to the situation. "Ethnic identifications are politically contingent; broadened or narrowed as the situation warrants"(Vincent 1974:376). This is clearly the case in northern Alaska where, due to changing political conditions, it has become beneficial to be identified as Native. Presently Alaska Natives are choosing to emphasize their indigenous status through language and clothing whereas prior to the 1980s Native identity was often a liability (Simeone, pers. com., 1998). Ethnicity is but one element in an individual's status set and whether he chooses to mobilize depends upon the situation.

In times of stress, ethnicity may strengthen individual and group bonds in much the same way as ritual practices (Vincent 1974:377, Turner 1967, 1969). Situations of rapid social change may intensify ethnic phenomena and group formation. The high emotional loading of group membership and identity is one reaction to social alienation; group formation is a type of constructive reintegration into less alienating social structures (Talcott Parsons 1975). Terms such as 'boundary',

'group', and 'category' imply that ethnicity is an actual entity, but ethnicity is better characterized as a process. A person may categorize himself according to different factors at different times. Ethnic diacritics may take the form of overt signals or signs (e.g. dress, language, house style, or physical characteristics) or basic values (standards of morality and excellence by which the performance of individuals is judged) (Barth 1969, Hensel 1996).

Hobsbawm, who argues that the traditions on which ethnicity is based are usually invented, also notes that invention is probably more frequent in times of rapid social change.

> "...we should expect it to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable, or when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible...[Hobsbawm 1983:4].

In answering his own rhetorical question of why historians should be interested in the invention of tradition, Hobsbawm makes an important point. Inventions of tradition (and ethnicity, I would add) can be symptoms and indicators of problems that might

be otherwise difficult to recognize and whose time of origin is difficult to date. In historian Hobsbawm's words, "They are evidence" (1983:12). Invented traditions are important to studies of nationalism since the modern 'nation' is defined by constructs of tradition, symbolism and discourse. This argument applies to Alaska where there is an increasingly contentious gap between rural and urban, Native and non-Native, resource protection and resource development, and commercial and subsistence resource uses. Individuals and groups are taking sides on issues whose resolution depends on legal definitions of traditional and customary. The litigious atmosphere is engendering responses in which people are positioning themselves culturally or temporally to be able to claim long-standing associations with lands or resources.

Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1983) suggests a more subtle interpretation of invention in his argument that nations are imagined political communities. The term 'imagined' is particularly apt because, as he notes, "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (1983:15). Anderson equates 'imagined' with 'invented' or 'created' and states that nations are formed when a group of people conceive of themselves as

comrades in a larger whole. Secular nations in Europe coalesced out of the large religious cultures whose communities were linked by sacred languages and religious signs. As vernacular languages (secular languages such as English, French, German or Castilian) gained in importance, appearing in print and dominating business, the larger religious communities were fragmented and territorialized. This occurred at the same time that exploration of non-European parts of the world made knowledge of other cultures available and, as Anderson notes, fostered a relativist attitude. People realized that their religion (or way of life, or language) was not *the* only religion but was *one of many* religions. This consciousness of 'others' set the stage for Europeans to understand themselves as members of individual nations, constructed largely out of vernacular language differences and signified by local customs, clothing, food, and other practices. These outward markers of difference symbolized deeper differences such as values, behavior, and the sense of interconnection.

The idea of imagined nations is equally useful in considering issues of ethnicity. While Anderson privileges vernacular languages in the construction of nationalism, ethnic consciousness is constructed out of any common experience and/or shared physical or cultural traits. The critical element is the realization that

there are others like you and others not like you and that there is a limit or boundary (however indefinite it may be) to the membership.

> The nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation in the way that it was possible, in certain epochs, for, say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet [Anderson 1983:16].

The imagined community of the nation or ethnic group is reified through the articulation of the everyday policies and practices of the state system, becoming "...embodied in material practice and lived experience" (Alonso 1994:382). People imagine a certain ethnicity for themselves and 'make it so' through their actions and their adherence to values and norms associated with that particular form of ethnicity. The use of 'invention' in conjunction with ethnicity acknowledges its culturally constructed nature.

**Ethnicity and Class**

If ethnicity is defined only in its objective sense, that is by others outside of the group, then the effects of ethnicity and class may augment each other. Issues involving ethnicity and class are easily confused, especially when situations of discrimination arise. There should be a clear distinction between 'minorities' and 'ethnic groups'. Ethnicity and minority groups may or may not coincide but minority group members are "subject to disabilities in the form of prejudice, discrimination, segregation, persecution, or some combination, at the hands of another social group...the majority"(Vincent 1974). The majority's dominance does not necessarily lie in greater numbers but in greater power over political, social and economic factors. An ethnic group is a separate entity, one that functions independently of class distinctions. Ethnic identifications are politically contingent, arbitrarily created and mobilized by group members as needed. The difference between ethnic and minority status is located in the individual's choice or lack of choice. Minority status is objective, ascribed by others, while ethnic status is self-ascribed. The identification of all groups of people as 'ethnic' could lead to the assumption that the political and economic gains made by ethnic groups in the United States are available to all groups, which is not the case (Vincent 1974:377).

A more realistic view of ethnicity and class is one that sees them as independently operating variables in a continuum of social relationships. Some anthropologists have concluded that ethnicity and class are interrelated but are still analytically distinct (Despres 1975, Van den Berghe 1975). They argue that the relative importance of ethnicity and class in a given situation must always be empirically determined and never assumed. Van Den Berghe observes a complex interplay between class and ethnicity in Peruvian society, using the term *cadena aborescente* (branched-out chain) to describe a social structure with a myriad of relations of dominance and dependence based on at least a dozen interrelated factors. Class hierarchies include peasants dominated by small town bureaucrats, who in turn are dominated by provincial capital elite, who are dominated by world centers of trade. Ethnic hierarchies begin with Indians dominated by *cholos (*people intermediate in status, above Indians and below *mestizos)* dominated by *mestizos* (people who are carriers of Spanish culture). Van Den Berghe points out that there are also hierarchies of education, language, and government and that these hierarchies overlap at times with class or ethnicity so that the effect of any given hierarchy may be increased or diminished by the others. Groups and levels intermix and the lines of class and ethnic cleavage are often not the same (Van den Berghe 1975).

Hensel presents an example of the self-ascription in his description of Yup'ik subsistence practices in southwestern Alaska. He notes that a long history of intermarriage between Natives and non-Natives in the region has created a situation in which people's identities are not easily determined by genetic heritage. Instead, a person's identity is demonstrated through their way of life and adherence (or non-adherence) to subsistence and related practices. "Ethnicity...was and is validated through practices and interactions that symbolically situate one as a certain kind of person on a continuum, recognizing that such placement is always context-dependent" (Hensel 1996:84-85). In his study, participation in subsistence activities in an approved manner and subsequent discourse about subsistence are the markers delineating identity. It is by these behaviors that individuals demonstrate their connection with the land and its resources and validate their identity as a person who maintains the correct Yup'ik relationship with animals, the natural world, and the community.

As Hensel sees it, ethnicity is "enactment rather than categorization"(Hensel 1996:85) Both he and Partnow (1993) criticize Barth's use of ethnic category, stating that it is too rigid. A close reading of Barth, however, indicates that his views are actually close to Hensel's own. Barth does use 'ethnic category' but he states that a

person belongs to a certain category because he/she is a certain kind of person and, since they are that kind, they agree to be judged by those standards. He notes that "ethnic categories provide an organizational vessel that may be given varying amounts and *forms* of content in different socio-cultural systems"(Barth 1969:203, emphasis added). This does not refute Hensel's conceptualization, which is of a person positioned along a continuum of identity based on performance at a given moment. Chosen identity, as he uses it, is congruent with Barth's 'ethnic category' based on standards and willingness to be judged. Both Barth and Hensel stress the centrality of human agency in understanding individual and social identity. Barth states, "...there is usually a deeply systematic difference between people's reflexive generalizations about macro-features of their world and society, and their conceptualization of their social and physical environment seen as an opportunity situation for action" (Barth 1981:4). He emphasizes, as does Bourdieu, that anthropology should create models based on practice, that "...by insisting on events and interaction as central features of our object of study, we are compelled to confront a far broader and more diverse segment of reality"(Barth 1981:4). It is here that we see the most useful conceptualizations of ethnicity, the one that resists reifying it and turning it into a limited, static 'thing'. Michael Fischer describes the transmutable quality of ethnicity:

> ...[ethnicity is] enriching because of its inter-references, not reducible to mechanical functions of solidarity, mutual aid, political mobilization, or socialization. It is the inter-references, the interweaving of cultural threads from different arenas, that give ethnicity its phoenix-like capacities for reinvigoration and reinspiration. To kill this play between cultures, between realities, is to kill a reservoir that sustains and renews humane attitudes [Fischer 1986].

Ethnicity is a strategy by which individuals construct rationales for group formation, membership and behavior. Contrary to categorizing definitions, ethnicity is fluid and has porous boundaries, various markers, and changeable participants. The ability to adapt, accommodate, and invent are the means by which people maintain meaningful identities that allow them to function in the complex societies of the contemporary world.

As seen in the preceding discussion, the concept of tradition plays an important role in the construction of ethnic identity. Tradition is one of the most powerful tools used to construct and justify identity and ethnicity. It is a complex concept that has accumulated as many meanings and uses as ethnicity. I will now

consider the chamaeleon-like entity of tradition and its relationship to ethnicity and identity.

**Tradition: Symbol and Process**

*Traditional custom, taken the world over, is a mass of detailed behavior more astonishing than any one person can ever evolve in personal acts no matter how aberrant.*

*—Ruth Benedict*

To understand the role of tradition in constructing and maintaining identity, it is helpful to review how the term has been construed within society at large and within the social sciences generally. In conventional parlance, 'tradition' denotes an inherited body of beliefs and customs–bounded and definable. Tradition is the opposite of modern--tradition is old, modern is new; tradition replicates, modernity invents. This commonsense understanding of tradition as a static core of ideas and customs handed down from the past assumes that tradition is a distinct entity made up of identifiable traits. It is a bounded entity with an unchanging essence that can be reduced to component traits. The traits may be analyzed to determine which are old or new and how they combine to form a particular tradition. This definition of tradition prevails in non-academic usage and, until the mid-twentieth century, dominated academic thinking as well. Most of our world views and daily practice are

grounded in very clear ideas about the traditions of our families, workplaces, churches, communities, cultures and nations.

In Western society, the concept of tradition has fallen in and out of favor over time. The uncritical acceptance of tradition as a primordial 'given' developed during the eighteenth century when 'traditional' society was viewed as an old, backward relic that impeded the new, logical and scientific ways of life espoused by the Enlightenment and fed by the growth of modernism. In the nineteenth century as enthusiasm over Enlightenment ideology waned, traditional ways were romanticized and viewed as examples of the pure, good old-fashioned life that had been supplanted by the individualistic, unfeeling modernism of Enlightenment thinking (Handler and Linnekin 1984; Shils 1981). Naturalistic conceptions of tradition and traditional society were the basis for understanding and measuring social change in modern society. These ideas were incorporated into the social sciences of the time and found parallels in Tonnies' *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (community and society), Durkheim's mechanical and organic solidarity, the spurious and genuine culture of Sapir and Redfield's definition of the folk-urban continuum (Handler and Linnekin 1984).

Tradition has been used in many guises and for many purposes within the social sciences. As a noun, singular or plural, it describes something that comes from or was created in the past. A folk tale tradition or particular traditions of holiday celebration are examples of this narrow use of the term. In a broader sense, tradition is frequently conflated with culture; a common tradition implying a common culture. The terms have been used interchangeably; for example, Marett (1920) states: "It is quite legitimate to regard culture, or social tradition, in an abstract way as a tissue of externalities, as a robe of many colors woven on the loom of time..." Just as ethnic groups were thought to be survivals, the plural noun 'traditions' corresponds to Edward Tylor's conceptualization of 'survivals', where traditions are cultural objects or practices that were left over from earlier, more primitive times. For Tylor, these survivals were useful in understanding the behavior of the rural peasants or 'folk' that existed on the fringes of urban, industrial society. Tylor called these survivals "traditions handed down by memory from ages before writing" and collected examples of them as data (Tylor 1960[1900]:373). The collecting and cataloging of these 'data' reified tradition and provided both anthropology and folklore with a collection of objects for scientific analysis (Horner 1990:8). This focus on traditions followed the evolutionary paradigm, one that asserted that groups of people progressed through stages from primitive to folk to civilized (Morgan 1964). Ethnic

groups were seen as remnants of more primitive times that had not been fully absorbed into the civilized present. Although the idea of survivals lost favor when anthropology began to focus on fieldwork, the basic premise of salvage anthropology, as well as the historical reconstruction and diffusionary studies that followed it, was still the assumption that anthropology would seek out and preserve the past ways of life of societies labeled 'traditional'. These efforts resulted in descriptions of cultures that were static images of a past that might have been. From this perspective, tradition remained a discrete object or practice with traceable continuity through time.

The view of tradition as a definable entity was augmented by American archaeology in the early to middle 1900s. Beginning with South American archaeology, the term tradition acquired a meaning that was used in opposition to archaeology's concept of horizon. An archaeological horizon style described a style of ceramic that was distributed over a large area but that had a relatively short life in the archaeological record. In contradistinction, a ceramic unity with a relatively narrow geographic area and a long time span, was called a "tradition" (Willey and Phillips 1958). Archaeologists saw the concept of tradition as a collection of distinctive traits

that were continuous through time. This use, however, contributed to the conflating of tradition and culture. Willey and Phillips note:

> It appears certain that the Peruvian Andes and coast were a unified culture area in that the important culture developments were essentially local and basically inter-related for at least a thousand years. This fundamental cultural unity justifies seeing ceramic developments in terms of long-time traditions...[Willey and Phillips 1958:53].

Archaeology, in its need for and insistence on strictly defined analytical categories, maintains this definition to the present time.

In addition to its role as a noun, tradition is used as an adjective to associate objects or practices with the past, as in 'traditional' clothing or 'traditional' hunting practices. Until the middle twentieth century, social science used tradition as an adjective to describe whole societies that were thought to change slowly. The disciplines of sociology, anthropology and folklore viewed traditional societies as unchanging–the opposite of modern societies that changed continuously. This conceptualization of traditional societies coincided perfectly with the concepts of 'tribes' and the idea that ethnic groups would eventually blend into the melting pots of larger nations. The groups identified as 'traditional' were those ethnic groups that had not yet assimilated. Many characteristics of traditional societies were considered

traditional--clothing, language, practices--and were tangible evidence of their "otherness". This perception of traditional groups remains prevalent today and, in Alaska, is one of the reasons that non-Native sport hunters object to a priority for subsistence users. Subsistence users are perceived as somehow having given up their resource rights because they no longer use 'traditional' hunting implements or transportation.

The awareness that ethnic groups persisted led to a reassessment of the definition of tradition as well as of ethnicity. Investigations by social scientists (e.g., Eisenstadt 1973; Handler and Linnekin 1984; Shils 1975, 1981; Williams 1977) into the functioning of tradition within different cultural milieus gradually shifted understanding away from a strict conceptualization of the term. The contingent nature of tradition and when and how it is employed has led to an understanding of the concept as a symbolic, interpretive tool that is wielded by groups to construct, maintain and defend their identities.

**Tradition as a Symbol**

When tradition is employed in a symbolic sense, it often serves political purposes. As noted earlier in the case of ethnicity, factions vying for power employ

traditional forms to 'stand for' a particular regime. One way a political movement establishes its authority is to link itself to tradition. Establishing a connection with tradition authenticates a political regime, providing it with links to the past that become symbols of authenticity. Political systems in China, Burma and Russia, for example, have generally opposed socialism to tradition. However, many regimes actually incorporate tradition, adopting local symbols of collective political and cultural identity already in existence in the region (Eisenstadt 1975). As socialism moved across the Middle East and Africa, for example, its leaders adopted traditional symbols of collective identity. According to Eisenstadt:

> These symbols were turned into primary components of the new political system. Therefore the ideology of Arab socialism emphasized affinity to basic Islam tenets of community and social justice; ideology of African socialism emphasized affinity to basic African traditions of harmony and cohesion, of tribal community, lack of conflict... [Eisenstadt 1975:4]

These symbols were selected and sometimes even constructed from different 'traditional' elements in the groups that were being taken over by an incoming political regime. They are used to disguise the new government, making it appear to be linked with the established ethos of the group in question. This lends authenticity

to the new order and may even engender emotional attachment on the part of the subjugated group.

Traditional symbols legitimize political, social and spiritual claims and are used by both dominated and dominator. Imperialist forces of Britain deployed a system of colonization that, because of its own inherent respect for tradition, was susceptible to appeals to 'tradition' from its subjects. Eventually the colonized peoples turned the tables on the British, using tradition to sway the colonial administration when they disagreed with its mandates. Not only did they make claims based on actual traditions, they invented traditions to suit the particular goals that they wanted to achieve (Colson 1974). Barnes's study of the Fort Jameson Ngongi in Africa illustrates this manipulation. Ngongi people reinterpret the past as necessary to fit the needs of the political present. Barnes states, "In the courts, appeals to the value of traditional custom are made to gain acceptance for new rulings, while in ordinary life breaches of custom are widespread and are not censured" (Barnes 1960:324).

Traditional symbols are not only useful in political situations. As noted in the discussion of ethnicity, the keys to collective identity are the sets of symbols and associated meanings that a group adopts and maintains. Whether these symbols are used for political purposes is immaterial, although they are often obvious tools for

achieving political ends. When cultural symbols from the past are used in constructing ethnicity, the reference to tradition helps create new symbolic systems (Spicer 1980:8). Whether real or perceived, their relationship with the past lends credibility to a group's claims and becomes a means of maintaining connections among group members–past and present. Actual, traceable connection with past practices or events is of no consequence to the efficacy of traditional symbols–they perform equally well whether actual or invented. Tradition is often conveyed through expressive culture where behavior, events and objects are felt to embody it in 'traditional' dances, 'traditional' crafts, 'traditional' songs and 'traditional' costume. Lastly, tradition is the handmaiden of ethnicity, a powerful tool employed in arrays of recognizably 'traditional' languages, practices and objects to differentiate one group from another.

## Conclusion

This review of the phenomena of ethnicity and tradition reveals conceptual and operational interrelationships. They augment each other, processually, resulting in powerful claims of culture and heritage that are used to pursue the political as well as social aims of individuals, groups and nations. Assimilative pressures have driven Iñupiaq people to constantly redefine and defend their identity and their rights to

land and resources. They have undertaken this defense through strategies that maximize the political and social efficacy of ethnicity and tradition. These strategies have worked both internally to increase solidarity within Iñupiaq society and externally to increase the political power that the Iñupiat can employ in achieving group objectives. Iñupiaq clothing, with its links to cultural heritage, has been, and continues to be, an important vehicle for the negotiation and presentation of both ethnic identity and tradition.

The above discussion of ethnicity and tradition has established a framework for my investigations but the ideas of several other anthropologists have also influenced my thinking. These include Gell (1998), Hebdige (1979), Strathern (1988) and Turner (1987). Hebdige (1979) and Gell (1998) have addressed the topics of identity, symbolism and intent–Hebdige through clothing and Gell through art. Both argue, as Leach (1976) does, that symbols to have active roles in negotiating meaning and instigating action. Hebdige (1979) regards dress as a system of signs but his approach transcends a strictly semiotic view in finding that objects of style hold meanings other than their signifying capabilities. According to Hebdige (1979:114), the objects of style chosen by a group develop their significance to the groups as it develops its structure, activities and image and so those objects do more than signify,

they carry and reflect the primary values of the group that adopts them. In a similar vein, Gell(1998) disputes the concept of art (and, I would argue, dress[3]) as a visual language. In his study of non-Western art, Gell ascribes a more immediate and dynamic role to art, arguing that it is a system of action that is "intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it" (Gell 1998:6). Defining art as a system of action related to social process avoids the pitfalls of defining art in a Western, aesthetic sense and attempting to apply that definition to non-Western objects that were not produced with aesthetic intentions. He points out that art objects are made in the physical and social worlds; their production and use are components of social processes that are connected to other social processes such as exchange, religion, politics and kinship. Gell, using Trobriand canoe prow-boards as an example shows that art objects are practical mediators in social process and should not be interpreted 'as if' they are texts.

Gell's work is also useful because he devises a workable anthropology of art that treats objects within the context of their manufacture and use rather than abstracting them from that context and placing them in a 'neutral' Western art or art

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Here I use the term dress to include all forms of bodily decoration, including tatoos, jewelry, clothing and cosmetics. "Dress is a basic fact of social life and this...is true of all human cultures that we know about; all cultures 'dress' the body in some way..."(Entwistle 2000).

historical context. At the same time Gell does not denigrate the aesthetic qualities of the objects but notes that the extraordinary qualities of the objects (and the admiration and/or mystery engendered by them) gives them a more powerful efficacy in negotiating relationships within their sphere of influence. He critiques some recent works on the anthropology of art (e.g. Cootes 1992, Morphy 1996, Price 1989), noting that their ideas are based on the assumption that an appreciation of non-Western art stems from an understanding of the aesthetic frameworks that produced it. He argues that an understanding of those frameworks does not constitute an 'anthropology of art'. For Gell, an anthropology of art must focus on the 'social context of art production, circulation, and reception' (1998:3). Art objects are part of the social processes of exchange, politics, religion and kinship and an anthropological theory should take as its subject matter the 'social relationships between participants in social systems of various kinds'. Culture has no independent existence separate from its manifestations in social actions. Thus, for Gell, an anthropology of art assumes that objects act with agency to enable social relationships. His ideas are congruent with those of Strathern (1988) in that both adhere to the concept of 'distributed' person where actions and their effects are the 'outcomes of mediated practices in which agents and patients [the acted upon] are implicated in complex ways' (Thomas 1998:ix). Applying these ideas to Iñupiaq clothing, we may see

specific garments as not only the product of an individual, but also, and simultaneously, the product of a complicated interplay of societal and cultural agency. The parka is seen as a distributed extension of an agent and, as such, acts with intent in its interactions within society.

Gell's approach is applicable to the analysis of clothing and offers a practice-oriented framework for investigating clothing design, construction and use rationales within a given cultural setting. An Iñupiaq parka not only symbolizes ideas about family, subsistence, or group solidarity but, in being constructed and worn, it is an active element in the maker's and wearer's worlds. It 'changes the world' because it enables the wearer to negotiate his or her needs to survive within the social and physical environment.

Strathern (1988) has influenced my thinking in another sense through her discussion of a theory of social action where constructs of person and society become visible when people wish to create the conditions for new actions. The meaning of actions are known through their effects and outcomes. This relates to Turner's concept of 'cultural performance' as a mode of symbolic action. Cultural performances, according to Turner, are reflexive and allow a group to evaluate and change its actions and/or beliefs (1987). The effects and outcomes of people's actions

reveal underlying constructs of society; an analysis of outcomes discloses the meaning embedded within practices. Applying these ideas of social action and cultural performance to clothing practices helps to understand some of the more subtle links between clothing and identity, and culture and society.

## Chapter 2: Northern Alaska—Environment and People

### Introduction

As in most instances where small, relatively isolated indigenous groups are engulfed by large industrialized nation-states, opposing and coinciding forces act on them, shaping relationships that defy simple interpretation. The history of the Iñupiat of northern Alaska is no different. Seemingly a relatively straightforward case of acquiescence to Euroamerican colonization, there have been in fact many complex undercurrents shaping Iñupiaq culture. The fabric of contemporary Iñupiaq life is comprised of threads of resistance, compromise and accommodation to the dominant force of Euroamerican society–threads spun out of the particular cultural, political and economic factors that converged on northern Alaska beginning in the mid-nineteenth century.

In northern Alaska, the pre-colonial period was characterized by a relatively stable Iñupiaq population clustered in eleven groups or nations (Burch 1998).[4] Each nation kept to particular territory within the larger region and moved within it in a seasonal round based on food gathering and hunting strategies. People within each nation were connected by broadly construed kin relationships and interdependent subsistence activities. Travel and trade between nations occurred but was fraught

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Simpson, visiting northern Alaska in 1852-1854, estimated the population at 2000-2500 but Burch (1980) estimates an 1840 population of 10,000 people. Bockstoce (1988) notes that Burch's data were more accurate for people living in the interior.

with danger, requiring elaborate negotiations and often the construction of fictive kin relations to protect travelers from hostile groups (Burch 1998, Ray 1975). Contact with Europeans occurred as early as the seventeenth century in other parts of Alaska but northern Alaska was protected by its inaccessibility until the influx of commercial whalers beginning in 1848. Once this contact was underway, a sequence of changes in technology, economics and settlement began, driven by commercial resource exploitation, compulsory education and religious conversion, and population decimation from introduced disease.

Iñupiaq Eskimo villages today are a complex mixture of what might be termed indigenous and introduced components. In reality, however, mixture is inaccurate because neither indigenous nor introduced components have remained 'pure' within the mix. A more accurate term would be 'solution', in which all components have blended and interacted with each other and are transformed into a completely new product, one in which the original elements are changed and cannot be restored to their original form.

While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to thoroughly address the history of the region, a basic outline is necessary to understand the relationships among the people, land and events. In this chapter I present an abbreviated overview of the history of northern Alaska, describing the environmental, historical, ethnographic and political contexts.

## *Environment*

### Geography

The homeland of the Iñupiat Eskimo people includes all of Alaska north of the north shore of Norton Sound and west to the Mackenzie River Delta area in western Canada. The region encompasses diverse land and water features including thousands of miles of ocean coastline, extensive river and lake systems, major mountain ranges and the arctic coastal plain. The area is bisected by the Brooks Range, an east/west running mountain range that extends west for 600 miles from the Canadian border nearly to the Bering Sea. North of the Brooks Range is the arctic coastal plain, a flat, relatively featureless expanse of land thickly strewn with lakes, ponds and meandering streams that wend their way north to lose themselves in the Arctic Ocean. This land area north of the Brooks Range, known as the North Slope, is underlain by permafrost and overlain by a rich carpet of tundra plants including lichens, mosses, sedges, and dwarf shrubs, many with edible berries.

The Brooks Range itself consists of wave upon wave of rugged, glaciated limestone peaks connected by knife-edged ridges. The higher elevations are nearly barren of plant life but the south-draining river valleys are home to northern boreal forest species including paper birch, cottonwood, aspen, and white and black spruce. The land south of the Brooks Range is divided by many river valleys and smaller

mountains and hills. The south-flowing rivers of the east and central Brooks Range drain into the Yukon River system. Those in the west flow into the Noatak and Kobuk drainages that empty directly into the Chukchi Sea. North of the mouths of the Noatak and Kobuk is the Seward Peninsula, a land mass that extends west into the Bering Sea and is the point on the North American continent closest to Siberia. The Seward Peninsula is topographically varied, including mountains, hills, plateaus and flat coastal areas.

The diverse land and water features of northern Alaska fostered the development of a variety of subsistence strategies on the part of Iñupiat. The navigable rivers, mountain passes and extensive coastline facilitated travel throughout the area, encouraging communication and trade between various Inupiat groups as well as with other native Alaskan peoples. As Burch (1975) notes: "The physiography of Northwest Alaska contributed to the existence of numerous relatively discrete regional ecosystems which constituted natural foci for human activities: at the same time it permitted relatively easy contact between regions."

**Climate**

*Animals know lot more, they know so well again. The birds run away like anything, bunch of cranes pass, they the good weather forecasters, they smart. Whenever they pass, we know we don't have too many days to enjoy the summer. We all know, along this coast, when they start doing that, it's time to not expect to have summer very*

*long. You've got to start rushing what you doing to finish it. Finish what you're doing. They know what we don't know, they do.*

—Job Kokuchurok

With the exception of the Seward Peninsula which is in the subarctic climate zone, Iñupiaq people live in the arctic climate zone, generally defined as the region of the earth north of the Arctic Circle.[4] Seasons in the arctic are differentiated by the length of daylight and the intensity of heat radiation supplied by the sun. The arctic summer is brief and marked by long daylight hours (continuous daylight north of the Arctic Circle) and high temperatures from just above freezing to 65 degrees F. The climate varies with specific location; interior areas are warmer in summer and colder in winter than coastal areas where air temperature is moderated by the ocean. Winters in the arctic are long and cold with some areas having snow and ice cover for ten or more months (Maxwell 1977). Regions north of the Arctic Circle have winter periods of continuous dark. In Barrow, for example, the sun remains completely below the horizon for 72 days each winter (Spencer 1959). Freeze-up in the coastal areas usually occurs in mid-October with breakup occurring in late May.

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Oswalt (1967) and Sater, et al. (1971) note that the Arctic Circle alone is insufficient to define the arctic as a region. Climatologists suggest that the arctic is more accurately defined by the characteristic of cold such that the arctic is those areas in which the mean summer temperature does not rise above 10 degrees C (50 degrees F) (Sater, et al. 1971). This temperature boundary coincides closely with the tree line that marks the ecological boundary between the boreal forests and the tundra.

**Vegetation**

The vegetation of northern Alaska changes according to the physiography of the land. It includes lowland tundra, upland tundra and, south of the Brooks Range, taiga. Lowland tundra, occurring primarily on the coastal plain along the northern coast and in the Kotzebue Sound region, consists of wet sedge meadows and lakes dominated by cotton grass and water sedge. Upland tundra includes moist, alpine and shrub tundra with much of arctic and western Alaska dominated by tussock tundra formed from *Eriophorum vaginatum* (Viereck et al. 1992). Tussock tundra often includes several species of plants that produce berries commonly used by local residents. These are alpine blueberry, cloudberry, crowberry and, at slightly higher elevations, lowbush cranberry. Wild potato, wild rhubarb and wild spinach are other plants that are gathered for food. Many species of willow occur throughout northern Alaska, with taller species occurring in moist regions beside streams and lakes (MacLean 1980; Viereck et al. 1992). Iñupiat people in the interior used willow branches for tent frames, flooring material for sod homes, and for various tools and implements requiring wooden elements. In the taiga zones of northern Alaska black spruce, white spruce, paper birch and quaking aspen are the most common trees, underlain by shrubs and herbaceous plants and interspersed with alder and willow thickets (Viereck et al. 1992).

**Fauna**

*We fished, there's always fish, all different kinds of fish. On the Kobuk River we had salmon and humpies, but there's none at Selawik, it's grass bottom and salmon does not spawn where the bottom is grass...At Selawik we have pike, lots of pike, and different kinds of whitefish. All different kinds of whitefish. One time I counted oh, maybe eight, different kinds of whitefish and that is rich country up there.*

*—Lela Oman*

The diverse ecosystems of northern Alaska support a variety of mammals, many critically important to indigenous residents for food and clothing. Larger animals include caribou, moose, gray wolf, musk-ox, grizzly bear, wolverine, Dall sheep, arctic fox, red fox, river otter, and beaver. Porcupine, lynx, mink, marten and black bear live in the forested areas. Smaller mammals in the region include shrews, lemmings, muskrat, tundra hare, least weasel and arctic ground squirrel. Caribou, over-hunted with newly introduced firearms in the late nineteenth century, disappeared from the Seward Peninsula. They were somewhat replaced in the Native economy with herds of domestic reindeer, introduced in 1892 from Siberia.[5]

Beluga whale, bowhead whale, ringed seal and bearded seal, walrus, and polar bear are the most common marine mammals inhabiting the sea and coastal regions. Iñupiat use these mammals for food and also for raw materials such as skins, sinew, ivory and baleen. Fish, both marine and fresh water species, are also

[5]See later part of this chapter for a discussion of the introduction of Siberian reindeer to Alaska.

important to certain groups of Iñupiat people depending upon their location. Some Iñupiaq groups take advantage of salmon and arctic char, anadromous species that migrate from the ocean to freshwater on a seasonal basis (Freeman 1984). Iñupiat people also utilize whitefish, sheefish, burbot, arctic grayling, lake trout, pike, herring, tomcod, crabs and clams.

Northern Alaskans hunt a wide variety of birds and gather their eggs for food. Some of the species hunted include migratory waterfowl such as ducks, Canada geese and tundra swans. Cranes, puffins, murres, snowy owls and ptarmigan are also used (Ray 1984). Bird skins, especially eider, were used for clothing and parts of birds (puffin beaks, ptarmigan eye patches, and wings) became decorative elements or amulets.

Traditional Iñupiaq Eskimo culture was in part defined by the people's relationship to the environment, in particular their location at the margin of sea and land (Graburn and Strong 1971). Although some groups lived inland in riverine or mountainous locations, by far the majority lived on the coast and derived most of their food and materials from the sea. Even those groups living inland acquired marine food and materials through trade with coastal groups. Many of the similarities between widely separated Eskimo groups in the circumpolar north have their basis in this orientation to and dependence on the marine environment and its animal resources. Artifacts from the prehistoric Thule people, thought to be the ancestors of

contemporary Iñupiat people, indicate efficient and skilled utilization of sea mammals for food and raw materials. Products of the land were also important but were secondary to marine resources for most groups. Land and ocean resources were acquired on a seasonal basis and their availability drove the annual round of Eskimo subsistence activities (Freeman 1984, Weyer 1969).

## *People*

### Prehistory

*...the belief I'm telling you the forefathers know even before their grandpa tell them, they know. Way back. White people always say, they are educated, they go to college, they tell us, "Eskimos are not in Alaska, just a few hundred years". We have a story, that the first one [person] that come, there was no dirt on top, no dirt like we got now. This is new, this dirt, this dark dirt we see, with grass, that's new. There was mineral, right on top, only it just covered up. And the cliffs were solid when they first come. Now they break. When they first come they never break. When you want to climb the cliff you can, they don't break. They start to get scared of them, when I start to do the cliffs they always say, "They're not like that when we first come to Alaska. They're getting old, that's why they crack off." They have just been solid not long ago, according to Eskimos.*

*And there were lot of dangerous animals when they first come...Unusual animals, not like today's animals. The last ones they kill was a big mouse. Like a big mouse. When they hunted from Point Barrow he used to eat them. When they go east, in the eastward part there's a big lake, they say. Where his head, they used to see. We have*

*that story, the big head, the one two brothers kill because he was a nuisance for all hunters. They get ready the equipment and they let this brother be the bait...When the mouse start to go after his brother, he went with a kayak, go right by him and put a spear on him. Kill him on the side while he's going after his brother. That's the only way they got rid of him, they beach him, and they left the head there.*

*—Job Kokuchurok*

Contemporary Eskimos are linked to the land in traditions that span thousands of years and are based on their ancestors' creative cultural adaptations to an arctic environment. Humans did not always live in the arctic regions of North America. The earliest evidence of human occupation is 11,700 B.P. when humans hunted large land mammals such as bison and mammoth in northern Alaska. By about 6000 B.P. humans who migrated to St. Lawrence Island from the Chukotka Peninsula had begun using marine resources. Evidence of marine resource use in northern Alaska dates to 4200 B.P. in the Norton Sound area and indicates that people used marine mammals seasonally in combination with inland resources (Langdon 1995). People withstood the rigorous climate and took advantage of the resources of sea and land by developing specialized shelter, clothing, and subsistence strategies.

Over the next several thousand years humans gradually developed the technology to hunt large marine mammals such as whales and walrus in addition to seals. By 1000 B.P., a group of people that archaeologists call Thule had developed a subsistence strategy that combined large marine mammal hunting with other

resource uses such as fishing and caribou and waterfowl hunting to successfully survive in a broad range of environmental conditions (Giddings and Anderson 1984). These direct ancestors of contemporary Eskimo peoples invented float harpoons and built skin boats that enabled them to take advantage of the resources in the open waters of Bering Strait as well as coastal and inland resources. This versatility enabled them to expand eastward along the northern coast of Alaska, Canada, and Greenland, concentrating on large marine mammals but utilizing other locally available resources as well (Langdon 1995, McGhee 1978). A warming climate, ca. 1000 A.D., probably allowed whale and walrus populations to move into the central Arctic, encouraging the Thule expansion, and a subsequent cooling climate, ca. 1600 A.D., eventually forced the Thule people to depend more on other resources such as caribou and fish (Dumond 1977, Langdon 1995). With this combination of resource utilization skills they could move into areas where the hunting of large sea mammals was not possible, thus effectively populating all of the habitable coastal lands from Alaska to Greenland. Archaeological evidence indicates that the Thule culture spread rapidly across the northernmost reaches of North America, supplanting or perhaps absorbing the earlier Paleoarctic culture and ultimately reaching its easternmost limit in Greenland.[6] Contemporary Inuit people are the direct genetic and cultural progeny

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The Norse settlement of southwestern Greenland in AD 986 occurred before the Thule people moved into the region. Although the contact between the Norse and Thule peoples could be considered the first contact between European and Inuit populations, it was not the same type of

of the Thule people (McGhee 1978). Although Thule culture seems to have been originally homogeneous across the arctic, different groups responded differently to changes in the environment and to local conditions, thus developing unique regional characteristics.

The Iñupiaq Eskimo developed a distinctive culture that may be differentiated from surrounding groups. Northern Iñupiaq culture was distinguished in dialect and material culture from that of the Mackenzie Eskimo people of the coastal territory east of Herschel Island. To the south of the Seward Peninsula and the Brooks Range, Iñupiaq culture differed linguistically, ideologically and in material culture from Yup'ik Eskimo and Koyukon Athabascan cultures.

**History/Ethnography**

Since my research seeks to understand the changes in Iñupiaq culture brought about by contact with Euroamerican culture, I will briefly describe the ethnographic context of northern Iñupiat at the time of contact. This description is largely drawn from the work of Bockstoce (1977), Burch (1975, 1981,1998), Ray (1975), Spencer (1959),and VanStone (1962). Additional Information has been gleaned from the

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colonialist/indigenous interaction that characterized later relationships. The early Norse settlers were farmers and pastoralists who, in Greenland, were operating at the environmental margins of their agrarian system. They were in no position to coerce or conquer the Thule people when they migrated into the area and, in fact, the Norse eventually died out, leaving Greenland to the Inuit populations. See Jansen (1972) and McGovern (1979, 1991) for a discussion of the Norse settlement and Norse/Thule interactions.

accounts of early explorers including Captain Otto von Kotzebue(1821), Sir John Franklin (1971[1828]), Captain Frederick W. Beechey (1831), Thomas Simpson (1843) and John C. Cantwell (1889) and the early ethnographic studies conducted by J.Simpson (1988[1855]), Murdoch (1988[1892]) and Nelson (1983[1899]).

The environment of northern Alaska and its animal populations were critical factors in the formation of Iñupiaq culture. Iñupiaq people developed highly successful strategies for utilizing the resources of the north. Both the acquisition and the utilization of many of the resources required the cooperation of a large group of people. In the face of this necessity, Iñupiaq social structure developed a flexible, inclusive extended family concept. Kinship solidified the partnerships between people that facilitated the cooperation necessary for the greater good of the community or group. Cooperation in hunting, whether maritime sea mammal hunting or inland caribou hunting, allowed people to procure food in situations where an individual hunter would not be able to acquire enough meat to support himself and his family. The structure of sharing within the group assured that all community members would have as much food as possible, even if they themselves were unable to procure it.

Tribal groups (Rainey 1947) or nations (Burch 1998) were composed of several separate regional bands who occupied a common geographic area and were identified by geographically distinct names, e.g. *Killigmiut* were associated with the

Killik River (Burch 1998). Within the regional bands were clusters of families that lived together for protection and cooperation in subsistence activities. The sod houses that were the permanent dwellings of these groups formed villages that were occupied during the winter months. During the summer these aggregations of families broke up and individual family groups moved to other locations to take advantage of seasonal hunting or fishing opportunities.

The Iñupiat reckon kinship bilaterally today (that is, applying kinship terms to all individuals related through blood ties on both the mother's and father's side). Bilateral descent systems provide each individual with a wide array of kin, maximizing mutual interdependence. The individual belongs to his/her nuclear family as well as a larger, extended kin grouping. Non-blood relationships are recognized and included, widening the group's sphere of kinship relations.[7]

The Iñupiaq extended family includes all those who live together in one household, work together and call each other by kinship terms (Spencer 1959). It is not limited to parents and their children but may include grandparents, brothers or sisters and their families, or wife's relatives. Matrilocal and patrilocal residence are equally common, depending more on expediency and the needs of other family

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Non-kin relationships that entail kin-like responsibilities include adoption, hunting partnership, broken marriage situations and, in the past, wife exchange. In all of these cases the individuals involved (and their children, in the case of marriage or wife exchange) became involved in the same cooperative relationships as blood kin (Spencer 1959:85).

members (e.g. elderly grandparents, economic need of either wife or husband's family, status of the husband on a whaling crew). "My dad is from Fish River and he married a girl from down there, from Cape Darby. [After they got married] they lived right there in Cape Darby, yes, her line is just as important as my dad's line. They're all the same" (Kokuchurok pers. com. 1999). Spencer (1959) notes that the requirements of the larger group can often supercede the demands of the nuclear family, at least as far as residence is concerned. The nuclear family, however, with its gendered division of labor, is the vital economic unit of Iñupiaq society. Nuclear family members provide food, prepare it and make clothing. The extended family provides mutual interdependence and aid, and assistance in times of stress. Individuals know that relatives will always grant them food, clothing and shelter. As Burch (1975) states, "...most traditional "settlements" were in fact kinship units, and no one was ever voluntarily in a situation where no relatives were present."

Although Rainey (1947) and VanStone (1962) note the demise of the aboriginal extended family system in Pt. Hope, citing the disappearance of the practice of several related men and their families living together, the extended family still functions in contemporary villages, even though individual conjugal families tend to live in separate homes. These homes are often clustered in kin related groupings and many essential activities and responsibilities are still shared, including women sewing for kin, sharing food, food preparation and child care, and men hunting and

sharing equipment with extended family members.

The environmentally-influenced, family-based social structure embodies certain core values that continue to define Iñupiaq culture. These are respect for animals, family loyalty, helpfulness, sharing, cooperation, and the subsistence partnership between husband and wife. The processes that continue this partnership and maintain its cultural significance are among the primary focuses of my research. "Although men dominate the cycle of subsistence activities, women have a definite part to play. Men do all the hunting but women take an active part in hunting activities at all times of the year, and do most of the fishing. During whaling, women not only participate in the preparations when they sew the new covers for the skin boats but they are an integral part of activities on the ice...Women do all the preparation of meat and skins and thus have a keen interest in winter and spring hunting. A man and his wife thus form an active partnership for carrying out the subsistence activities" (VanStone 1962:76). Bodenhorn (1997) notes that both men and women may perform tasks that are customarily done by the other gender. Within the gendered division of labor, as long as people perform the tasks expected of them they are welcome to take on the other gender's activities without criticism. The active collaboration between men and women yields a balanced relationship in which females have an equal say in decision-making and exist as autonomous persons within the egalitarian Iñupiaq social organization (Bodenhorn 1997).

**Spirituality**

*While we were walking way up on the Fish River, when he [my dad] was gathering wood, I play with the knife. I cut the plants around there... kind of fun to use knife and they would fall down. My dad taught me, "Don't ever do like that, make fun of anything that grows, they're alive, everything is alive." That's a teaching from their great grandparent fathers. Everything you see is alive. Animals, they know. They look like they are ignorant but they talk among themselves, like people. They can see, they can see me in town, they can see me, what I do in the village, among the people, they know. They look ignorant and can't talk but they know. These are our own, they are going to listen to us, all these around here, they going to listen to us.*

*—Job Kokuchurok*

Eskimo religion consisted principally of beliefs and practices oriented to the spiritual world of the animals and to a more general supernatural world from which could emanate hostile forces. Through ceremonies, charms and sometimes with the help of a shaman, an individual sought to avoid evil and to mollify the spirits of the animals. The Iñupiat, like other northern peoples, believed that all natural phenomena, whether rocks, animals, humans or weather, had souls and were capable of purposeful action. The animals that were hunted, therefore, were sentient beings that could choose whether or not to give themselves up to the hunter. As a result, humans had to make every effort to behave properly in regard to animals.

In order to be successful in hunting, people had to maintain a respectful relationship with the animals by offering them prayers, wearing appropriate clothing, participating in ceremonies and carrying or wearing amulets to attract or placate the animal spirits. Hunting ceremonies involved the wife as well as the hunter. Spencer (1959:272-274) notes that the wife offered animals from the sea a drink of water when they were brought into the village and that mittens were sometimes put on seals' flippers. The animal's spirit would then tell the other animals that the people had given it gifts and that they should also give themselves to the people. Wives of whaling captains had especially important duties to perform in making and maintaining the crew's clothing, behaving properly while the hunt was taking place, offering the whale a ceremonial drink of water once it was landed and distributing parts of the whale as it was cut up (Spencer 1959, Worl 1980). Animals could perceive the intentions of all humans, whether male or female, so it behooved the Iñupiat not to jeopardize their hunting success by offending the animals.

Shamans helped people maintain a positive balance with supernatural forces. If a negative event such as illness or bad weather occurred, it was the role of the shaman to determine what had gone wrong, which individual was responsible and what to do to remedy the situation (Spencer 1984). Shamans generally inherited their powers although people could become shamans by obtaining spirit helpers through visions or trances. They learned the intricacies of shamanism, including taboos,

amulets, chants, and shamanistic performances from their visions and other shamans. When bad events occurred, the shaman mediated with the spiritual world through a shamanistic trance, receiving information about what to prescribe for a cure while in the trance. They were paid for their services by the people who requested their assistance. Because of their power to negotiate with evil forces and their sometimes deviant behavior, shamans were often feared by other community members (Schweitzer and Lee 1997:53). The advent of Christianity in the late nineteenth century combined with Western medical knowledge to dispel much of the power that shamans held over the Iñupiat.

**Neighbors and Intercontinental Trade**

The Iñupiat were surrounded on three sides by other indigenous groups with whom they maintained both trade and warfare relationships in traditional times. To the east along the arctic coast were the Mackenzie Eskimos and, in the mountainous areas to the east and south, the Athabascan Di'haii Gwich'in and Koyukon Indians. Koyukon Indians and Iñupiat mingled along the Kobuk River until, by the early twentieth century, the Iñupiat assimilated the Koyukon speakers (Burch 1998:324). Neighbors to the south of Norton Sound were the Yup'ik Eskimos. Both Iñupiat and Yup'ik speakers live in Unalakleet, a village that straddles the divide between Iñupiaq and Yup'ik territory. Across Bering Strait were the Siberians including Chukchi and

Asiatic Eskimo peoples. Some intercontinental trade took place between groups, however long-standing animosities between the Siberians and Alaskans kept the exchange limited until contact with Euroamericans reduced the fighting and increased the trading opportunities (Ray 1984, Schweitzer n.d.). Large trade fairs at Anyui on the Kolyma River in Siberia, Sheshalik on Kotzebue Sound and Nirlik at the mouth of the Colville River drew people from great distances to trade. Caribou skins, sinew and fur from the interior areas were traded for coastal goods like seal oil, skin, and ivory. Indigenous goods were traded for Western items that came via trading networks from Siberia or from the British in Canada. Early goods from Siberia included beads, bells, metal and reindeer skins; later firearms and whiskey were included in the exchange (Ray 1984, Spencer 1984).

**Contact**

The history of contact between indigenous Alaskans and Euroamericans is largely a tale of economic exploitation. Russian and English fur traders and, later, American whalers, expanded their operations into North America over a period of two hundred years. The story begins in Russia in 1648 when Semen Dezhnev and Fedot Alezeev became the first westerners to sail through the Bering Strait. Dezhnev and Alezeev were Cossacks who traveled from the mouth of the Kolyma River, around the easternmost tip of Siberia to the mouth of the Anadyr river. They set the

stage for Russia's defeat of Siberia. By the end of the seventeenth century Russian Cossacks had subdued all of Siberia except Kamchatka and portions of Chukotka--sweeping from the Urals to the Pacific Ocean in just sixty years. Subsequent Russian expansion into Kamchatka provided a base for the exploration and exploitation of America (Bockstoce 1977, VanStone 1984) .

In 1728 and 1741 Vitus Bering led expeditions through Bering Strait from the south—expeditions with over 600 participants that included many high profile scientists. The research on Siberia and America, sponsored by Peter the Great, generated important scientific accounts of the newly conquered lands. During the second expedition, Bering landed on Kayak Island but did not encounter any natives. Chirikov, the commander of the other boat in Bering's expedition, tried to land near Cross Sound but lost two boats and many crew members in the attempt due to hostile Tlingit Indians (VanStone 1984). Bering's expeditions pioneered the way for fur traders to exploit the wealth of the north Pacific; these traders pushed into the Aleutians and, by 1762, reached Kodiak Island. In 1792 the Russian-American Company, under the leadership of Aleksandr Baronov, extended its reach from the Aleutian Islands to Sitka.

Captain James Cook, in a 1776-1780 voyage, mapped portions of coastal northwestern Alaska up to Icy Cape in his search for a northwest passage between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Cook's voyage stimulated Russian activity further

north in Alaska, probably because the Russians did not want the British to usurp their political and fur trading position in America (VanStone 1977). The resulting flurry of explorers included more Russian expeditions and even a ship from France. Otto von Kotzebue commanded a Russian expedition to the Bering Strait region in 1815, exploring Kotzebue Sound and encountering Eskimos in the area. At the same time the Russian-American Company, in response to increasing British fur trading activity, extended its purvue north from southern Alaska. As fur resources were over-exploited, the company looked north to Southwestern Alaska, establishing redoubts that could serve as bases for exploration into interior Alaska. One such expedition, led by Korsakovskiy, established Aleksandrovskiy Redoubt on the Nushagak River. Another Russian-American company venture sent Vasilii Kromchenko and Adolph K. Etolin to survey the coast of northern Alaska in 1821-22. Kromchenko and Etolin made contacts with Eskimo people along the coast north to Norton Sound (VanStone 1973,1984).

These coastal expeditions were followed by interior explorations that resulted in the establishment of the Kolmakov Redoubt on the middle Kuskokwim River and the Mikhailovskiy Redoubt near the mouth of the Yukon. In 1842-44 Lt. Lavrentii Zagoskin explored the Yukon River nearly to the mouth of the Tanana River, as well as the Kuskokwim and Koyukuk rivers, contacting Eskimo and Indian people along the way. In 1821-25, Britain, in an effort to block Russia's expansion into North

America, sent John Franklin and William Parry to travel overland across Canada and by sea from Hudson Bay, looking for a northwest passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Frederick William Beechey was to bring H.M.S. *Blossom* around through the Pacific to rendezvous with Franklin and Parry in Kotzebue Sound. In addition to meeting Franklin and Parry his orders stipulated that he was to collect natural history specimens and make scientific observations. While waiting for Franklin, Beechey explored the coast from Kotzebue to Point Barrow; Beechey's ship's barge crew were the first Euroamericans to reach Point Barrow. Franklin, in the meantime, reached the mouth of the Colville River and turned back to Canada. Between the two efforts there remained only 150 miles of uncharted coast on the shores of North America (Bockstoce 1977).

The fur trade and Russian expansion into America resulted in the exploration of all of coastal southwestern Alaska and much of the interior along major rivers by the mid nineteenth century. Russian fur trade activities also resulted in the establishment of contact between indigenous residents and Europeans in these same areas of Alaska. Northern Alaska, however, was a different story. Although the coast had been explored and some brief contact between indigenous people and Europeans had occurred, interior regions of northern Alaska remained relatively untouched by European influences. Some availability of trade goods was the only exception to this isolation. Through trade networks and indirect trade with Asia,

Iñupiat people acquired beads, knives, reindeer skins and tobacco (Larsen and Rainey 1948). But these trade goods, isolated from the cultures that produced them, did not appreciably change the aboriginal lifestyle of northern Alaska (VanStone 1980, Bockstoce 1977). Substantive contact with Euroamericans did not come about until the 1850s with the advent of commercial whaling in the Arctic Ocean[8].

The 1848 arrival of the first whaling ship in Bering Strait was a harbinger of whalers, missionaries, and traders who would introduce a new way of life to northern Alaska--one that transformed the social, economic, and even physical environment of the Iñupiat.

The first whaling captain to sail north of the Bering Strait was Captain Thomas Roys. Roys ventured through the Strait on July 25, 1848, discovering rich whaling grounds that set off a rush of whalers to the western Arctic which was to have far reaching effect on the native residents of northern Alaska. More than 2700 whaling voyages ventured into the arctic waters between the years of 1848 and 1921, until

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[8]One possible exception to this statement is the evidence that at least a few of the people in the Kotzebue had traded directly for firearms earlier than 1820. Hillsen, an officer on the sloop *Blagonamerennyi* on the 1819 Vasil'ev-Shishmarev expedition, noted in his journal that Eskimos in the Kotzebue Sound area had English-made muskets (Ray 1983).These must have come from American traders since it was illegal to sell firearms at the Kolyma trade fair. Ray's research reveals that six American ships were in Arctic waters between 1815 and 1820 and she believes it likely that one of them had traded the firearms to the Eskimos in Kotzebue Sound.The appearance of such a significant trade item as firearms at this early date appears to be an anomaly, however, since after 1820 virtually no direct trade occurred at or north of Bering Strait until the 1848 incursion of whalers and attendant traders (Ray 1983). Simpson (1988[1855]) notes that Point Barrow people had English muskets and beads "within these few years", gotten through the Mackenzie Eskimos from the Indians further east.

the collapsing market for whalebone and oil and the diminished whale populations made whaling unprofitable (Bockstoce 1986).

The sailing ships of that era, carrying the technological, material and conceptual products of Euroamerican culture, changed the environment of the north. Technologically advanced materials and tools and a cash-based economy came hand-in-hand with the more intangible elements of culture such as ideas, values, and religion.

**Goods and Tools**

*...they will make it better [than I can] for they do not count the time, and will work for days on something that any white man would throw oil on in a few hours...It is contrary to the Eskimo's nature to let any work pass from his hand unless it is well finished. They are a race of artists.*

—*Charles Hawkesworth*, Bureau of Indian Affairs School Files

Whaling ships must have been perceived as cornucopias of wondrous goods to the native people of northern Alaska. In addition to goods specifically intended for trade, the ships carried a wide array of supplies, equipment for whaling, ship repair and general maintenance. Ropes, sail canvas, metal knives and needles, tools, pots and pans, clothing, guns–all would have been desirable to indigenous Alaskans. Highly skilled at manufacturing everything that they needed to survive in the arctic from locally available materials, the Iñupiat immediately appreciated the functionality

of the newly introduced materials and tools. Trade goods carried by whaling ships included knives, needles, matches, iron pots, tobacco, beads, cloth, firearms, ammunition, and rum. As whalers and traders recognized the rich trading opportunities in the north they brought an ever increasing variety of goods. "Trade items...included: thousands of yards of ticking, drill, denim, calico, flannelette, foot sewing machines, hand sewing machines, needles for same, thimbles, canvas, serge cloth, scissors, needles, records, and lots of other good stuff" (Bodfish 1936:195). These items and many others were exchanged for furs, baleen and ivory.

The great variety of tools carried by whaling ships must have been particularly appealing to the Iñupiat who were excellent craftspersons even with only limited access to metal tools. Early archaeological sites in northern Alaska yield aboriginal tools fabricated out of chipped stone and, later, ground slate. By about 1100 years ago some aboriginal people had begun using iron-pointed tools. Collins (1973:23) states that the iron must have originated in Siberia where it was acquired from Chinese and other central Asian sources. This use of metal in tools was rare, however, and most pre-contact men's knives, ulus, needles, and other implements were made of slate, bone or ivory. Women had elegantly functional sewing kits that hung from their belts and carried needles, sinew, a thimble and perhaps a small sewing ulu and an awl. These kits were decorated ivory tubes with a length of hide threaded through the middle and knotted or attached to a bead on one end and a

belt hook on the other. The needles were stuck into the leather, pulled into the tube and then the leather was looped over the woman's belt and secured with the hook. Thimbles or other implements were attached to the hook. These types of sewing kits, or similar variations, were prevalent among Inuit peoples across the arctic (Jenness 1946, VanStone 1980, Murdoch 1988[1892]). South of Norton Sound needle cases were hollow tubes made from the wing bones of geese or other large waterfowl with wooden stoppers carved to fit either end (Nelson 1983[1899]). Whenever metal was obtainable it was incorporated into the toolkits of the seamstresses. Jenness describes one of the seamstress's workbaskets:

> Her work basket is a sealskin, complete, with a large hole cut longitudinally in the back. Here she keeps her needle-case, a metal[9] cylinder about 8 inches long and ½ inch in diameter, --through which, drawn by a raw-hide lashing, passes a folded piece of skin in which the needles are kept. A nacre (mother of pearl) button prevents it from being drawn right through [Jenness 1991:65].

Although most sewing was done by women, men carried simpler sewing kits and were able to perform necessary repairs on their clothing or other gear when out hunting (Jenness 1946). Men also operated sewing machines as Jenness also notes, "Aksiatak Junior manipulated the sewing machine for a time for his mother (the men

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By the time of Jenness's visit (1913), the Iñupiat had had access to a variety of metal objects for at least sixty years so the needlecase he describes was probably made out of metal from a ship or trader's wares.

often seem to do this; Asecaq was doing it yesterday for Aluk's wife, sewing on a band round the bottom of a shirt" (Jenness 1991:87).

As soon as fabric became available through trade, Iñupiaq seamstresses began using it to make covers for the skin parkas. These covers protected the skins from snow and dirt, prolonging their usefulness. The covers also offered an opportunity to vary the wardrobe and to conform, to a greater or lesser degree, to the clothing mores of the Euroamericans. The parka covers were initially sewn by hand but, as sewing machines became practical after 1857 and were brought north on whaling and trading ships, Iñupiaq women quickly learned to use them and quickly became proficient with the new technology (Jansen, pers. com. 1998).

Always ready to accept more efficient innovations, the Inupiat adopted sewing machines along with many other western goods, incorporating them into their household inventories. "Every family has plates, cups, pots, kettles, buckets, etc., and the majority apparently have primus stoves, and some have sewing-machines" (Jenness 1991:44). Pressures to adopt western religion, language, and values accompanied these new introductions. Missionaries established churches and schools, insisting that Iñupiaq children speak English and encouraging adults to conform to the economic and moral forms of Euroamerican culture (Oswalt 1979, VanStone 1984). Tangible and ideological products of Western culture made steady inroads into Iñupiaq life, causing the Iñupiat to adjust to outside influences. The

adjustments resulted from both access to desirable opportunities and imposition of required standards. The evolution of Iñupiat clothing through this period documents how Iñupiaq people balanced these forces.

**Missionaries and Schools**

*My dad tell me like this, "You can't learn just from paper, how to live." I seem to amen that. Right now when I see a high school kid that have nothing to do, even though there's lot a trees to cut, he never go cut them for wood. Even though he can haul wood from along the beach, so he would save buying oil. Since he's educated he's trained to use oil, smarter than Eskimo way. See, they're smarter, correctly, but they're idle. Nothing to do in town.*

*—Job Kokuchurok*

The missionaries and teachers who traveled in the wake of the whaling ships traded in values rather than material goods. They came to convert the native residents--whom they viewed as underprivileged, uncivilized savages–to a Euroamerican-defined 'civilized' life of cleanliness and Christian morals. Informed by the paternalistic attitudes of the times, they were determined to remedy what they saw as the deplorable physical and moral state of Alaskan Eskimo people. Teachers, who were also trained as missionaries until 1897[2], imposed 'civilized' food and clothing, English language, and Christianity on the Iñupiat in exchange for abandoning aboriginal customs and beliefs. The United States government supported the efforts of missionizing societies to civilize Native peoples by appropriating funds

to support church organizations concerned with civilizing Native Americans. J.C.Calhoun, Secretary of War, speaking to the U.S. House of Representatives illustrates the predominant viewpoint:

> Although partial advances may be made, under the present system, to civilize the Indians...any efforts, which may be made, must fall short of complete success. They must be brought gradually under our authority and laws, or they will insensibly waste away in vice and misery. It is impossible, with their customs, that they should exist as independent communities, in the midst of civilized society. They are not, in fact, an independent people...nor ought they to be so considered. They should be taken under our guardianship; and our opinion, and not theirs, ought to prevail, in measures intended for their civilization and happiness. A system less vigorous may protract, but cannot arrest their fate [U.S. Congress 1820].

This attitude prevailed well into the twentieth century, affecting the treatment of indigenous Alaskans as well as Native Americans generally.

Sheldon Jackson, a Presbyterian missionary, visited Alaska in 1877 and became a force for assimilation and education of Alaska Natives. He garnered funds and support for missions and schools by speaking to Christian women's groups, the public and members of Congress about the condition of Natives in Alaska. In 1885 Jackson was appointed General Agent for Education in Alaska and used his position and federal funds to expand his evangelical and educational activities throughout

much of the territory.[10] He observed the near-starvation condition of people in northern Alaska, their "...low moral status.." and blamed it on the "...industries of the white man..." that resulted in the degradation of marine mammal and caribou populations that the Eskimo depended upon for food (Jackson 1893:11-13). To address this problem, Jackson, who had long been a believer in industrial schools for assimilating young Indians into White civilization, hit upon the scheme of transporting Siberian reindeer to Alaska to provide food and gainful economic employment for Alaskan natives (Ellanna and Sherrod n.d.).[11] He argued that, in addition to maintaining a dependable food supply, the introduction of reindeer herding as an occupation would move the Eskimo along the path towards civilization. He wrote:

> ...the introduction of domestic reindeer is the commencement of the elevation of this race from barbarism to civilization. A change from the condition of hunters to that of herders is a long step upwards on the scale of civilization. Probably no greater returns can be found in this

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Jackson was instrumental in the establishment of missionary-run but government-funded schools in various locations across the territory, dividing the region and assigning certain areas to certain religious entities. The Moravian Church operated in the Kuskokwim region, the Roman Catholics along the Yukon, and the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant in Unalakleet and Yakutat. Cape Prince of Wales went to the Congregationalist Church and the Episcopals operated at Point Hope. Although other denominations have moved into those areas over time, the strongest religious influence within each region remains the original denomination assigned by Jackson (Stewart 1908 in Ellanna and Sherrod n.d.).

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Jackson was not the first to suggest the importation of Siberian reindeer to Alaska but he did have the authority and, to some extent, the funds to make it happen. See Postell (1990) and Ray (1965).

> country from the expenditure of the same amount of money than in lifting up this native race out of barbarism by the introduction of reindeer and education [Jackson 1893: 13-14].

It was a package deal that combined religion, economics and education in a single, well-meaning, ultimately unsuccessful, social engineering enterprise.

Jackson was not initially successful in convincing Congress to fund his project; he used donations from churches and the public to fund the purchase of the animals. Captain Michael A. Healy of the U.S. Revenue Marine Cutter Bear, who also believed that reindeer herding would save the Eskimos, helped Jackson transport about 1280 reindeer to Alaska, starting herds on the Seward Peninsula at Teller, Port Clarence and at Kotzebue ( Ellanna and Sherrod n.d., Ray 1964,). Chukchi herders and, later, Saami from northern Norway, were brought to teach the Eskimo apprentices how to herd. The Chukchi herders were not successful teachers, a fact that was probably less due to the traditional enmity between the Chukchi and the Iñupiat than to the simple economic fact that it was not in their best interest for the Chukchi to help the Alaskans succeed at herding. Reindeer skins, particularly the mottled brown and white ones, had long been a desirable trade item that the Chukchi provided.[12] "Siberian reindeer skins in small numbers came as far east as Baillie Island, at least, before the whaling ships first came. They were considered much more "stylish" than

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Reindeer are the domestic form of caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*). Reindeer herding was a primary economic activity of many of the native peoples of the Eurasian arctic, including the nomadic groups of Chukchi and Koryak people in Siberia (Krupnik1993).

caribou because of their rarity and cost much more" (Bodfish 1936:356). Alaska reindeer herds would have a detrimental impact on their market (Ellanna and Sherrod n.d., Ray 1975). Eskimos did not take to herding particularly well. Those who became apprentices often left after a year or two, missing the hunting life that they were used to. Jackson's ideas of transforming the hunters to herders and therefore bettering their lot in life were based on his preconceptions of civilized activities. He did not realize that, to the Eskimos, hunting was far preferable to sedentism. Job Kokuchurok, from Cape Darby, comments:

> They [reindeer] used to be owned by the Lomen Company. One missionary sold them to white man, they were for Eskimos only, when they [reindeer] first come. He was a missionary so he sell them to white man. Well, I'm glad he did sell them. Why? Because white man, owner, treat reindeers better than Eskimos would. Eskimos are no herders. So I'm glad they took them [Kokuchurok 1999].

Reindeer herding, originally conceived of to feed the supposedly starving Eskimo and to give them a civilized occupation that would help them assimilate into American culture, shifted through the late 1800s and early 1900s into a largely non-native run enterprise. Eskimos were not given the deer that they were promised in their apprenticeship agreements; Jackson provided reindeer herds to missionaries and to the Lapp herders instead and, ironically enough, Eskimos who killed reindeer for food were punished. During the twenty years after the introduction of the reindeer,

Jackson's attitudes about the Eskimos shifted. His initial determination had been to save them, both physically from starvation and morally from savagery, and to assimilate them into American society. As time passed, however, his tone changed and his emphasis shifted to the promotion of economic development in Alaska. Under this scenario he claimed that the best role for the Native residents was as "...valuable helpers and assistants in the development of the country by the white men...(Jackson 1904: 19-21). Thus his original ideas of raising the Native peoples from savagery to civilization and making them citizens in an egalitarian sense, altered over time to a more colonialist mentality in which the Natives would supply labor to support the development of an American frontier (Ellanna and Sherrod n.d.).

The industrial school model was used throughout northern Alaska in the formulation of school curriculum. Along with the teaching of the standard three R's, teachers taught classes in cleanliness, temperance, sewing, cooking, manual training and wood working (Bureau of Indian Affairs 1910, Ellanna and Sherrod n.d.). The whole person, and in actuality, the whole culture was addressed. In some locations teachers held night classes for adults, covering the same course work that was taught to the children. Arthur Johnson, teacher at Nome noted, "Everything was made as practical as possible...Many of the men and women took their books to their homes and were quite diligent in studying them" (Bureau of Indian Affairs 1910). Mother's Clubs, organized by the missionaries, were another means of teaching cleanliness and

child care. In Barrow in 1924, the clubs were held every two weeks and were run by Mrs. Greist, the doctor's wife and Ann Bannon, a nurse (figure 2). Bannon describes the club in a letter to a friend in another village:

> We have the water ready when they arrive, also the tubs- a small bath tub for babies and a galvanized tub for the larger children who do not attend school...We also have their wash rags ready and towels. Some mothers have two or three children they bathe and wash their hair. We watch the clothing and see that it is clean and that they do not use the string or tight belt to hold up fur pants, but that they use a waist on which the pants are buttoned...Mrs. Greist wrote to the Women's Home Companion for their instructions and all the information they send out for Better Babies [Richards 1908].

As the educational system expanded, boarding schools run by missions or by the government were established in Sitka and Eklutna. Children were sent away from their home villages to attend these schools or Bureau of Indian Affairs schools in the lower forty-eight. Since travel was difficult and distances far, the children were often away from their homes for entire school years or longer. The effects of this exodus of children from their families and villages was far reaching in terms of both the students and the Iñupiaq culture. Removed from their homes and forced to speak English, the children lost their ability to speak Iñupiaq. They were isolated from the cycle of subsistence activities in their villages and the hunting, fishing and other activities of

Figure 2. Wainwright Mother's Club,1922 (IHLC 94-02-044)

their families and communities. When, after completing their schooling, they returned to their homes, they often found that they were strangers to their own community and culture (figure 3). One young woman who attended the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania and then returned to Barrow, wrote to the Chief of the Alaska Division of the Bureau of Education:

> I cannot believe I was born here and was raise on the woman backs. One woman told me other day she used to carried me on her back. If I didn't laugh good...I am so glad I have been out and learn how to be clean and other things. The boys and girls I used to play with are all married. I did not know anybody when we got here, but they say to me, my you are tall and fat. I have not learn to talk the language. I am so glad I had this chance of being help to my own people [Coodlalook letter, Bureau of Indian Affairs 1907].

She was employed as an assistant teacher in the government school at Barrow, spending much of her time teaching sewing. She writes in the following year:

> I like my work well and to be with my own people who need help. I like my work more every day and so are the children too...I will try to bring them to a better life and see what they need of help. Some times they forget to comb their hair and wash their faces and hands. I tell them about it. The next day they come clean. And they try to be clean. It is very hard for them to be clean always. Two or three families live in a same house. They eat on the floor and sit on it so they keep it very clean. Some home are very clean, just as clean as some people down

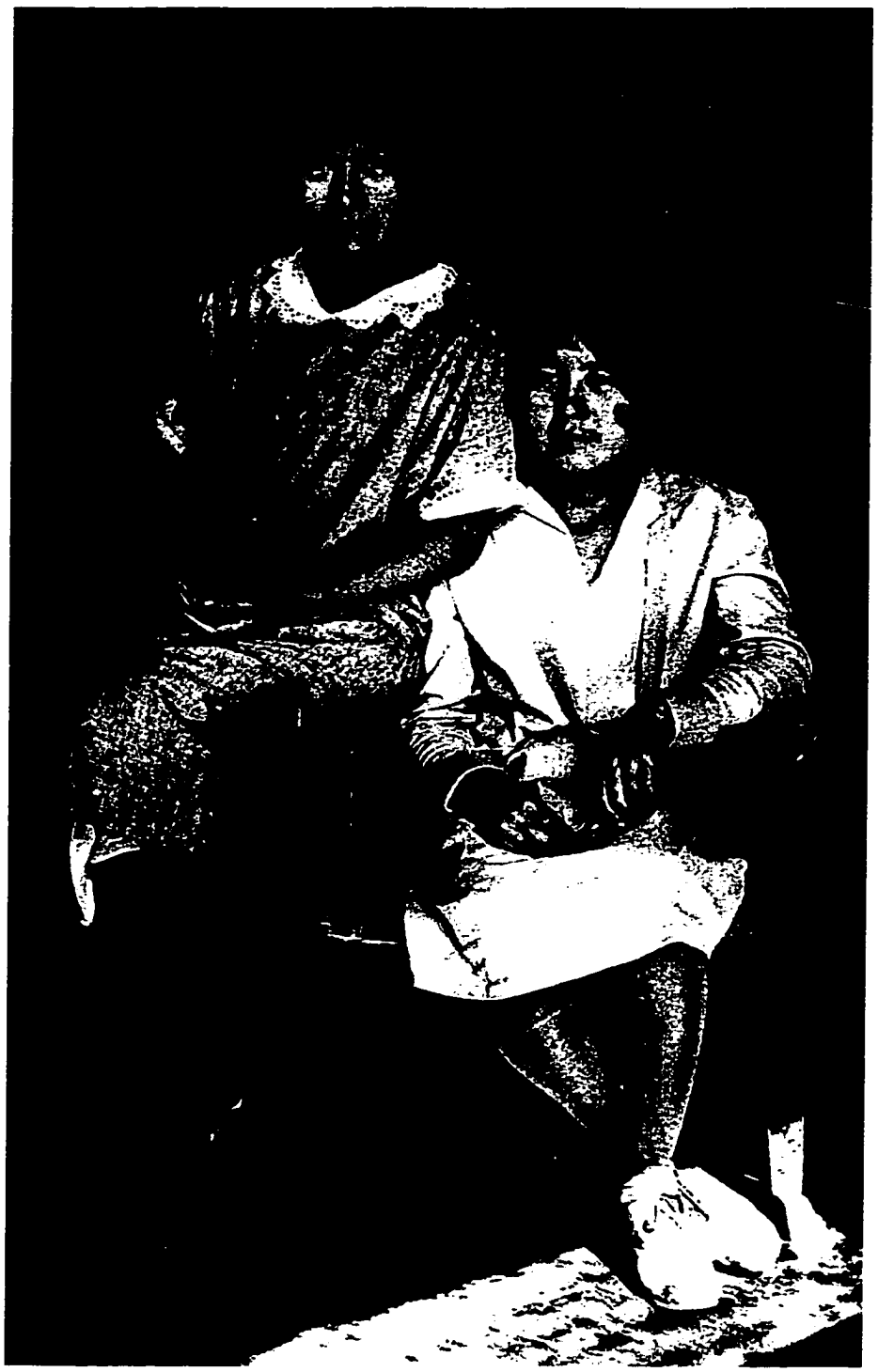

Figure 3. Girls at Sheldon Jackson School, 1927. (IHLC Th150)
Cornelia Phillips Hendrickson & Flossie George Connery

> at states. Their cooking is done well. Some time I eat with them and often it is best meal I had. They always afraid to asked me to eat for fear I would not eat their food [Coodlalook letter, Bureau of Indian Affairs 1908].

Industrial and domestic arts were strongly emphasized in all of the northern schools. The teachers describe these activities at length in their annual reports, detailing the particular activities of the students and noting that the industrial work was highly popular with the students, serving as an enticement for the rest of the schoolwork. Sewing was taught in the villages and at the boarding schools, providing a familiar activity that Iñupiaq girls enjoyed and that was a valued part of their own culture (figure 4).

> Friday of each week was devoted to the industrial work of the school, which I found to be a great means of stimulating interest in the general work and attendance. The larger part of the class was so interested in Sewing, Knitting and Crocheting that the pupils asked to take their work home [Cameron letter, Bureau of Indian Affairs 1915].

In addition to sewing by hand and machine, students were instructed in cooking, baking, carpentry and washing and ironing linens and clothing. Boys as well as girls learned to operate sewing machines and make shirts for themselves. The teachers working in northern Alaska were not limited to the more common academic

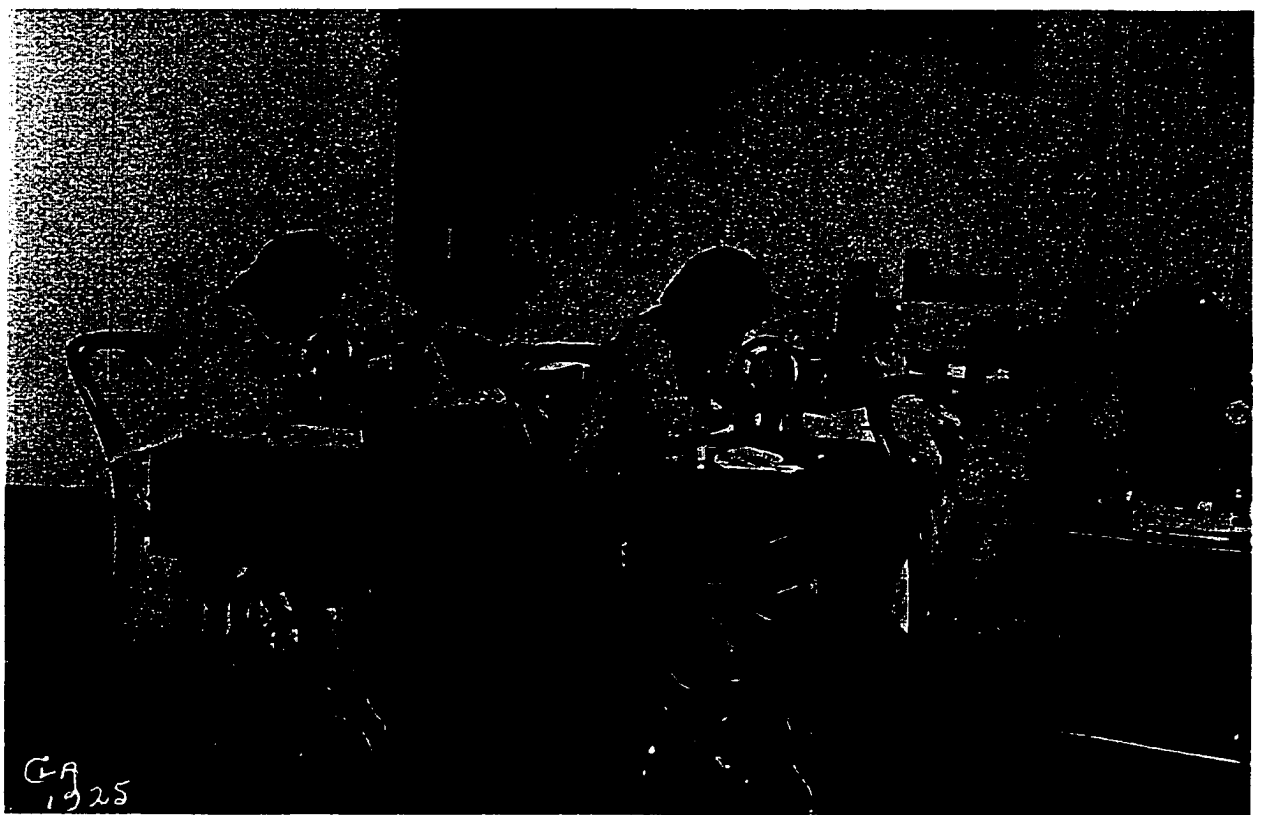


Figure 4. "A Sewing Class"
(Historical Album of Schools in Alaska, 1927-1931;National Archives-Pacific Alaska Region)

instructional topics. They visited homes and taught people about sanitation, distributed funds for the relief of the destitute, and provided medical assistance. "I attended to the minor cases of constipation, wounds, bruises, burns, sore eyes, rheumatism, skin disease, colds, etc. I also pulled a number of teeth" (Johnson letter, Bureau of Indian Affairs 1910). The influence of the teachers, working with and for the Native people in all of these areas of their daily lives, was strong and the instruction that they gave at school was reinforced by the work that they did in visiting people's homes, helping with illness and other misfortunes, reporting drunkenness to the authorities and providing relief for those in need. Even though after 1897 the teachers were hired by the government rather than the missions, the teachers persisted in the original mission-influenced forms and content of instruction. The student's entire life, and that of his family and community, were the objects of instruction and the subjects of change in the evangelical civilizing mode of education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Along with the education imposed by missionaries and, later, government teachers, the cash economy introduced by the whalers and traders caused far-reaching economic and social change. The Iñupiat, who had previously gotten all of their food, clothing, and shelter through subsistence activities, were introduced to wage employment that allowed them to acquire highly desirable western goods. Furs, previously obtained on a small scale for personal use, became an important

trade item, especially after the decline of commercial whaling in the early 1900s. Employment of one or more family members, most often the hunters, in whaling or trapping meant that the family had less native food available and was more dependent upon store-bought staples. Wage employment, access to western goods, and school attendance are some of the factors that combined to aggregate people in settled villages and to change the structure and rhythm of traditional Iñupiaq life. Through the demand for baleen, whale oil and furs, northern Alaskan Iñupiat became tied to an international market that had earlier been only peripheral. Once established, their connection to the wider world was irreversible and they were drawn into the web of interconnecting world economies.

Despite its seemingly irresistible incursions, the Iñupiaq people did not unconditionally accept Euroamerican culture. They accepted many of the commodities and practices of western culture but retained traditions vital to their culture and to survival in the arctic environment. This selective retention is not as simple as it might seem, however. An examination of the process reveals an often subtle, underlying complexity. Each component of Iñupiaq life, whether seemingly Euroamerican or Iñupiaq, was transformed by contact with the other culture. Although a given practice appears to conform to Euroamerican mores or, conversely, a given tradition may appear to conform to aboriginal practice, in reality each has been changed in some way by contact with the other. These changes need not be

viewed as acculturation in the anthropological sense. They are more accurately seen as selective adaptation. Milton Freeman discusses the same types of change relative to Inuit whaling:

> ...Inuit whaling has always been adaptive–that is, it has changed through time in order to remain functional and socially, culturally, and economically important as conditions have changed...It is in the nature of people to seek a better life for themselves and their families, and arctic archaeology gives ample evidence of four thousand years of increasing Inuit technological innovation...[Freeman 1998:26]

**Contemporary Issues**

The decrease of the whale population and the diminishing demand for baleen, due to the invention of celluloid and plastic, effectively shut down commercial whaling by 1915. Iñupiaq hunters took up fur trapping as a cash-providing activity until the Depression of 1929 and increasing competition from the Soviet Union caused the fur market to plummet (Spencer 1959). The destruction of the fur market meant that Iñupiaq hunters were thrown back on their own resources. In response, they turned once again to subsistence activities to provide necessary food for their families and communities (Spencer 1959). Spencer notes that during this time of need, people resumed the practice of community sharing and cooperation that typified pre-contact Iñupiaq lifeways.

**Economics**

So, in the case of northern Alaska, the addition of a wage economy and access to western goods, including non-hunted foods, did not displace the Native subsistence economy. The subsistence and market economies hybridized, producing a new economy that continued to support the Iñupiaq subsistence culture. This economy is similar, in some respects to the ritual economy that Yang (2001) discusses in her analysis of economic hybridity in Wenzhou, in southeastern China. There the profits of increased production and economic success in the region have been channeled into the ritual/religious system in the form of symbolic religious expenditure, restoration of ancestor halls, revival of sacrificial ceremonies, and an inflation of communal feasting for life-cycle ritual events (weddings, funerals, birth). Yang notes that not only is the ritual economy the result of economic development, it has also contributed to economic growth, providing a need for various aspects of economic activity. A similar scenario may be posited for northern Alaska with the introduction of a cash economy and wage labor. The Iñupiat worked for wages, beginning with whaling, hunting and fur trapping and then moving into mining, but, instead of using those dollars exclusively to purchase food and goods from the stores, thus removing any need to undertake subsistence activities, they spent them on equipment (firearms, ammunition, boats, snowmachines) to use in the pursuit of those activities. Thus, as Yang notes, "a native noncapitalist logic of ritual economy

made use of capitalist forms for self-renewal" (2001:481). This blend of economic systems continues in present-day northern Alaska.

World War II fostered the development of military infrastructure in Alaska and military-related industries provided wage employment for many Iñupiat. Iñupiaq men worked as laborers and heavy equipment operators for the armed forces throughout Alaska and specifically for the Navy as it explored the Petroleum Reserve on the North Slope and established the Arctic Research Laboratory at Barrow (Brower 1980, Chance 1976). The Navy also employed some Iñupiaq women as seamstresses (Spencer 1959: 363). After WWII the Cold War created additional employment opportunities for Native Alaskans when the United States built the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line across Alaska and northern Canada (figure 5). The DEW line stations required maintenance after construction was complete and some Iñupiat continued to work at those stations located in Barrow and Kaktovik. Steady employment may have provided regular paychecks but it decreased people's ability to participate in subsistence activities and thus conflicted with a 'traditional' Iñupiaq lifestyle.

The event with the most far-reaching effects on Iñupiaq culture since the arrival of commercial whalers in the northern Arctic in the mid 1800s was the 1967 discovery of petroleum on the Arctic Coast. This discovery, made by Arco at Prudhoe Bay, set in motion economic and social forces whose ramifications are still being felt.

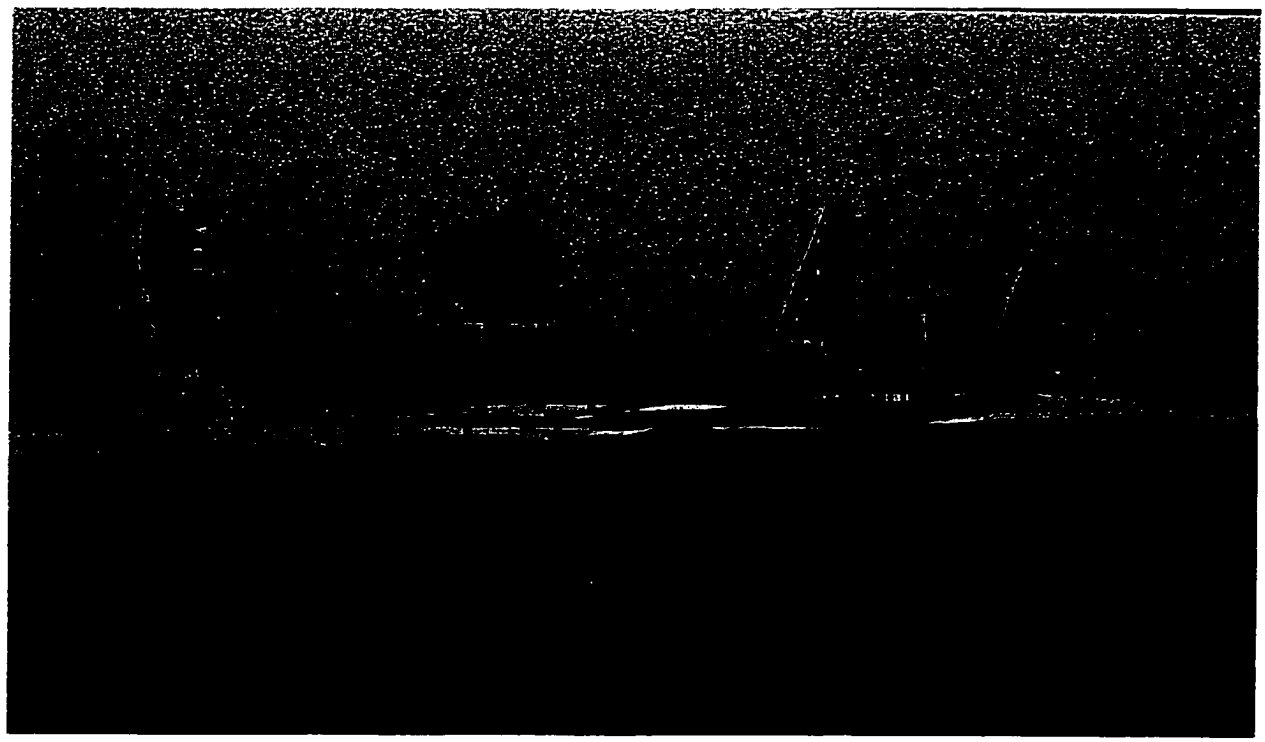

Figure 5. DEW line installation. Parks Canada photo.

Whaling, walrus hunting and the fur trade impacted resources of the north but they did not directly threaten the land itself. The discovery of petroleum, and the resulting desire of the State of Alaska to capitalize on that resource led to conflict between the State and the Iñupiaq people over land rights. The State, given the right to select 103 million acres of land from the public domain by the Alaska Statehood Act of 1958, was making selections that threatened the continued use of those lands by Natives. The ensuing battle over land claims involved the State, the Secretary of Interior and Congress and resulted in Alaska Natives finding their political voice, leading to the formation of the Alaska Federation of Natives and, ultimately, negotiating the passing of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971. The Act resolved the land claims issues by giving 40 million acres of land to Alaska Natives, extinguishing claims to any additional lands and compensating Native Alaskans for those extinguished rights with $962.5 million, to be paid over a number of years. Natives would enroll in one of twelve Native corporations as stockholders. Benefits accrued to individuals under the settlement act would be distributed through the corporations (Arnold 1978).

While ANCSA made great strides in resolving land claims questions in Alaska, it did not address Native subsistence rights, sovereignty or self-government issues. The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) protects Native "physical, economic, traditional, and cultural existence" and mandates a rural priority

for subsistence, requiring the State to manage fish and game resources to protect rural subsistence users (U.S. Congress 1980; Case 1984). In spite of the clear instructions of Congress in ANILCA, the rural priority for subsistence continues to be controversial. The rural priority conflicts with the State Constitution that mandates a right to subsistence resources for all residents of the state. This conflict has resulted in management of both game and fish in the state being taken over by the federal government in order to maintain the rural priority.

Alaska Natives are pursuing Native self-governance and sovereignty issues with increasing perseverance in recent times. The village of Venetie took its claim for 'Indian Country' and associated rights to the Supreme Court in 1998. Although the Court denied the claim, the case served to increase the profile of Alaska Native issues and indigenous rights on both state and national levels. In 1999, the Alaska Federation of Natives meeting resolutions included ten resolutions specifically directed at self-governance issues. Through the combination of increasing economic influence and a changing social paradigm that privileges tradition, Alaska Natives are gaining power within the state and are increasingly more able to pursue their own political and social agendas.

## Conclusion

The environment of northern Alaska and its animal inhabitants were critical factors in the formation of Iñupiaq cultural and societal forms. Clothing strategies developed in concert with the other aspects of culture that allowed the Iñupiat to live successfully in the north. Many aspects of Iñupiaq culture retain their importance today, enabling the renewal of social structure in a perhaps even more challenging environment than in pre-contact times. While Iñupiaq people still acquire much of their food from subsistence activities, all kinds of food, clothing and other necessities are available from local stores throughout northern Alaska. It is possible to live comfortably in any Iñupiaq village without taking part in fishing, hunting, trapping or gathering activities. But what cannot be purchased from stores is the social structure and cultural currency that continuing participation in subsistence lifeway provides to individuals, families and communities. Subsistence participation is the underlying framework that gives Iñupiaq culture its distinctive shape and the strong glue that holds it together. Freeman says in his discussion of sustainable use of living resources in the arctic:

> Although construction of dwellings no longer requires using the skins or bones of animals, such locally obtained materials continue to be used of essential footwear, winter clothing, boat coverings, and dozens of other uses throughout the Inuit homeland. However, it is especially in relation to meeting daily nutritional needs–as well as important social,

> economic, cultural, and emotional needs—that animals remain indispensable to Inuit everywhere [Freeman 1998:19].

The particular relationship between humans, animals and environment that shaped Iñupiaq culture and allowed humans to survive in northern Alaska remains crucially important to Iñupiat people today. In addition to providing essential nutrition, it shapes Iñupiaq identity, sustains Iñupiaq spirituality and maintains the social structure of Iñupiaq communities.

## Chapter 3: Iñupiaq Clothing

*But for the Eskimo, every day is one of carnival in this regard. I'm convinced that they glory in their appearance and that their prestige and their reputation for bravery among neighbouring peoples and even in the minds of Europeans is due to their attire...Nowhere but on the shores of the Arctic Ocean do fine clothes give such aplomb and confidence to those who wear them, and no doubt make them feel superior, full of honour and prestige.*

*—Father Emile Petitot*

### Introduction

Clothing has always been an essential element in the human repertory of strategies for arctic survival. As early as 11,000 BP in Alaska and 30,000 BP in Asia, prehistoric hunters used tailored clothing to meet the environmental challenges of northern climates so that they could take advantage of their rich game populations. This adaptation in Asia and the expansion of human populations across the Asian arctic and the Bering Land Bridge, brought people to the continent of North America. Tailoring allowed form-fitting clothing designs that trapped air around the body, creating pockets of warm air that conserved body heat. Layers and adjustable openings made the clothing system flexible enough to adjust to changing weather conditions and the activity of the wearer. Identical in theory to the layering systems of contemporary mountaineering and backpacking gear, the early tailored garments efficiently solved the problems of utilitarian function. This sophisticated clothing system made masterful use of available resources for materials. Its construction depended on the combined efforts of husband and wife since the hunter provided the raw materials and the seamstress made them into clothing. The skins of animals and birds, sewn with thread made from sinew using bone or ivory needles, were

transformed into utilitarian and beautiful clothing. This is the clothing heritage of the Iñupiat Eskimo of northern Alaska.

The subsistence partnership between man and woman, providing on one hand the raw materials and tools for clothing and on the other the expertise and labor of constructing the garments, is one of the features that shaped Iñupiaq social structure. The success of the family and the survival of the people as a whole rested on the interdependent collaboration of husband and wife. It was the core of the Iñupiaq subsistence system. Clothing, produced through the combined efforts of hunter and seamstress, embodied that relationship. Iñupiaq clothing practices today, and throughout the past 150 years, tangibly represent the continuing significance of the subsistence partnership through time; they also demonstrate the importance of that partnership in sustaining the social structure of Iñupiaq society. Men continue to hunt and women continue to construct clothing, replicating the relationship that has always been at the heart of Iñupiaq life. Iñupiaq clothing is more than a visible statement of cultural affiliation, it is also an actor in the reproduction of the relationships that shape Iñupiaq culture. Clothing negotiates kinship, gender, spirituality and, most recently, politics.

**Clothing Terminology**

In northern Alaska, present day clothing terminology reflects both the intermingling of Alaska Native cultures and the history of the contact period. The

Iñupiat have adopted some terms from other languages, and, as is the case throughout Alaska, different words that describe the same garment are often used interchangeably. There are two distinct sub-groups of the Eskimo language family in Alaska–Iñupiaq and Yup'ik. The Iñupiaq speaking region can be generalized as northern Alaska, north of Norton Sound and east across Canada to Greenland. Central Yup'ik is spoken in southwestern Alaska, south of Norton Sound to the Alaska Peninsula, including the broad region of the state formed by the deltas of the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers. Within the Iñupiaq area there are dialectical language differences.[13] *Atigi* (plural *atigiit*) is the term for the hooded garment that is worn on the upper body. The common English term is *parka*, a Russian/Aleut word that is used throughout English speaking Alaska and Canada. Iñupiaq people in Alaska use *atigi* and *parka* (and its diminutive *parkie*) interchangeably. The uninsulated cover alone, worn as a dress or over-blouse by women and as a light jacket by men, is called *atikluk* (plural *atikluich*) in Iñupiaq and, in more common Alaska-wide usage, the Yup'ik term, *qaspeq* (pronounced, and more commonly spelled, *kuspuk* in English). I will use the term *parka* for the insulated garments since it has the widest common usage and is most easily recognized by a general readership. I will use *atikluk* in my discussions involving the uninsulated covers for both women and men.[14]

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[13]The Iñupiaq words in my dissertation will be the North Slope Iñupiaq dialect from the Barrow area.

[14]See Appendix 1 for a list of Iñupiaq sewing and clothing terminology.

**Parkas through time**

The making and wearing of Iñupiaq parkas constitutes an unbroken practice from prehistoric times to the present. The overall form of the garment has remained constant while materials, technology and use have evolved. Iñupiaq parkas are a complex component of Iñupiaq culture and society. Made and worn ostensibly for practical reasons, contemporary Iñupiaq parkas constructed of commercially produced fabric are an everyday sight in Alaska and generally go unremarked in the context of common region-wide practice. It is these parkas, however, rather than the elaborately decorated replicas of late nineteenth century skin and fur parkas[15], that constitute a critical component of contemporary Iñupiaq life. Although the skin parkas are acknowledged as distinctive cultural objects and seamstresses' *tours de force,* they are not worn on a day-to-day basis. They are specially made for competitions and special events and are displayed in, and even commissioned for, museums and other public exhibits where they are sometimes categorized as art because of their craftmanship, creativity, and aesthetic appeal .[16] The skin parkas

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Historically parkas were constructed from a variety of animal skins including birds, fish and sea mammals in addition to caribou, reindeer and furbearers. Parkas made of caribou and reindeer are generally referred to as 'fur' parkas unless the specific animal is mentioned, as in 'caribou skin', 'reindeer skin', or 'seal skin' parka. Parkas made from muskrat, squirrel or other furbearers are termed 'fur' parkas.

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Doyon, Limited, an Alaska Native regional corporation, recently commissioned Nora Leavitt, an Iñupiaq seamstress in Barrow, to make a fancy skin parka to place on display in Doyon's new corporate office building. The corporation has chosen to celebrate not only Athabascan craftspeople and artists (their shareholders) but those from other Native Alaskan groups as well.

qualify as special celebratory pieces and, as references to 'traditional' Iñupiaq times, are symbolically significant. It is the cloth parkas, however, that are essential elements in the continuing everyday operation of the Iñupiaq social system.

An analysis of the role of women and the activity of sewing in Iñupiaq culture indicates that the tradition of clothing construction and its ongoing practice is a critical component of the Iñupiaq social system. As a product of the sewing activity, the parka is central to the woman's role in subsistence, facilitating the all-important animal/human relationship and fulfilling part of the woman's responsibility in the husband/wife partnership. Within Iñupiaq culture these garments are both symbols and active agents, in the sense that Gell means an agent as "one who causes events to happen in their vicinity" (Gell 1998:16). Parkas activate a series of social, aesthetic, and political responses within the contexts of both Iñupiaq society and the larger social environment of Alaska. This conceptualization of garments as both symbols and agents follows Leach (1976:7) in that the garments not only *say* something, they also *do* something. These garments are metaphors for Iñupiaq culture, gender, tradition, and identity as well as for more general referents such as Alaska Natives and the North. In their role as agents they sustain the subsistence system by linking women, animals and men and by making claims of tradition and ethnic identity.

Clothing constructed by women mediates the physical and spiritual relationship between humans and animals and, in contemporary times, the dialectic between tradition and modernity that defines contemporary Inupiat identity. Even

though contemporary parkas are constructed of fabric or purchased sheepskin with only the trimming and ruffs made of locally acquired furs, the connection between women and animals, and the importance of the woman's role in the subsistence system, is maintained through the meaning that continues to adhere to the garments. To understand the critical place of clothing and clothing practice within Iñupiaq culture it is necessary to construct a diachronic narrative about clothing from the mid-1800s, the time of contact, to the present. Current northern Alaskan clothing practices are accessible to research through observation and interviews, but information about pre-contact and historic-era clothing must be elicited from archaeological site reports, historical documents, photographs and museum collections.

**Prehistoric clothing evidence**

Some evidence of clothing from prehistoric northern Alaska can be gleaned from the archaeological record. Ivory figurines from the Punuk site on St. Lawrence Island (A.D. 900) are incised with lines that indicate clothing details including indications of the curved hemline and the triangular insets that bear a strong resemblance to the hemline and hood roots[17] of historic parkas (Collins 1973). Furthermore, actual items of clothing and clothing fragments have been found in

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Hood roots are triangular insets of skin that are set into the front and back shoulder area of parkas, anchoring the hood into the garment.

some sites in Alaska, most notably the Utqiagvik excavations at Barrow (Cassedy et al. 1990; Mason and Ludwig 1991). Clothing items from Utqiagvik Mound 44 (probably no younger than A.D. 1826)[18] include a woman's caribou-skin outer parka with rounded flaps trimmed with white fawn skin strips. Hood roots of fawn skin are set into the front of the garment, just as they are in historic garments. Pantaloons, caribou skin rain parka fragments, mukluks and polar bear skin mittens were also found in the excavation but these displayed no decorative elements. There is a strong garment design, decoration and construction correlation between the clothing found in the excavation and historic clothing from the area. This correlation suggests that clothing patterns along the arctic coast remained constant for as much as three hundred years before contact with western culture.

**Historic Clothing Evidence**

*You have no doubt seen the kind of clothes the Esquimox wear the hooded coat is called a "parkee" and the shoes made of hide are called "Muk-luks" their garments are very light in weight. The esquimox are bright cheery looking indians...*

*—Edith Fish 1904*

Information about Iñupiaq clothing around the time of contact is found in the accounts of explorers, whalers, traders and ethnographers who visited the arctic.

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Radiocarbon dating from Mound 44 indicates an age between A.D.1500 and A.D.1800, before any significant influence from western cultures reached the area (Cassedy et.al.1990).

Photographs, written descriptions and actual garments from the late nineteenth century provide detailed information about clothing design, construction and practice. Many historic photographs, taken as portraits or to illustrate a particular activity or place, contain a wealth of detailed information about clothing, showing as they do, people going about their lives in the clothing of the day.

Before the introduction of Euroamerican materials, Iñupiaq parkas were made of mammal, fish, or bird skins. Caribou was most commonly used for warmth because of the outstanding insulating qualities of its hair, which is hollow (Hatt 1969, Oakes 1988). In addition to the pragmatic function of protecting the wearer from cold and inclement weather, parkas had an esthetic function. They often incorporated animal referents in the form of amulets or specific construction elements. Caribou skins were used so that the skin of the caribou head formed the hood of the parka. The ears were often left on and became a component part of the hood.

> A coat should have in its making one deerskin with the head complete. This skin is used for the back of the coat. The natural shape of the skin as it is on the living deer will then give the proper form to the hood (Stefansson 1914).

Wolverine tails, ermine skins, or strips of wolverine fur were attached to the backs of parkas to suggest tails. Triangular gussets (hood roots) of contrasting color inserted into the fronts of the parkas gave a strong impression of walrus tusks (figure 6). It has been suggested that these elements codify the human-animal connection, a vital

Figure 6. "Tak-puk, Barrow chief." Ca. 1914 (AMHA B81.164.15)

spiritual component of Iñupiat life ( Chausonnet 1988, Murdoch 1988[1892]). Eskimo/Inuit religion stressed respectful treatment of animals. This included taboos against sewing land-animal skins during sea mammal hunting and vice versa (Stefannson 1914). To be successful whale hunters had to have new or newly refurbished garments. Their clothing in general had to be beautiful and sewn with small, regular stitches (Worl 1980). Elegant parkas from the late 1800s with precise, tightly sewn stitches and painstakingly detailed decorative trim attest to the attention that seamstresses lavished on their work (figures 7, 8). They adhered to general regional styles but their individual interpretation of those styles made each parka a unique testament to their skill and creativity.

**Tools and Materials**

Before contact with Euroamericans Iñupiaq seamstresses made clothing out of indigenous materials using tools of indigenous materials. Animal and bird skins provided the fabric of the garments, thread for sewing was made from sinew from caribou or beluga whales. Garments were decorated with strips of contrasting skin or fur, animal tails, bird beaks, and, when available through trade, beads or yarn. Seamstresses sewed by using sharp stone or bone awls to pierce the skins and ivory or bone needles to pull the sinew through the holes. They cut the skins with *ulus* (semi-lunar knives). Ulu blades were made from ground slate with handles of bone or ivory. Sewing ulus were often tiny and dangled from a woman's cylindrical

Figure 7. Parka collected by E.W. Nelson, Norton Sound, 1897 (Cat. # NMNH 176105)

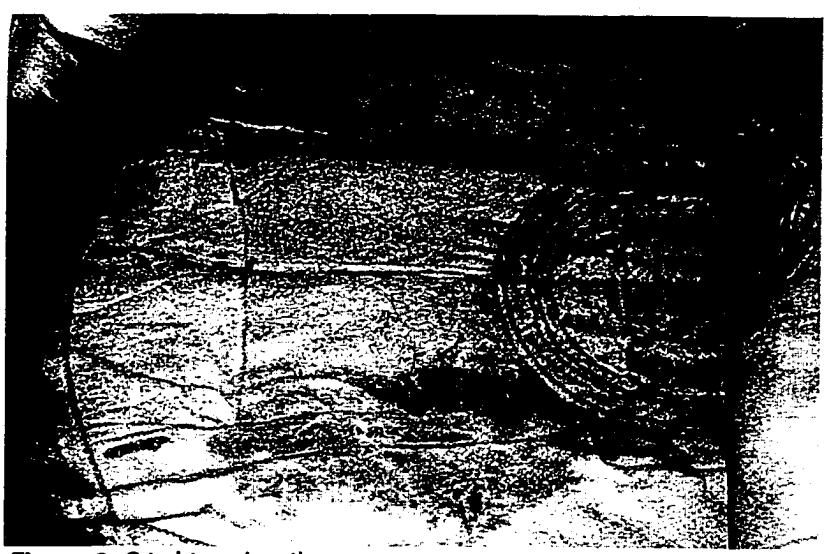

Figure 8. Stitching detail.

needlecase, along with a skin thimble (figures 9, 10). Women tanned the skins, scraping, soaking and working them to make them soft and pliable. Wolverine skins were soaked in an alder bark solution to dye the back of the skins red.[19]

After contact, trade goods included needles, scissors, fabric, thread and sewing machines. Sewing machines became popular in northern Alaska in the late 1880s. Although the sewing machine industry began in the late 1840s and Howe patented his machine in 1846, the early machines did not work very well and were awkwardly heavy. The head of the 1851 Singer machine weighed 56 pounds and was meant for industry. Grover and Baker made the first machines that really worked and that were portable. Their machines were operated with hand cranks or treadles. There are some accounts of sewing machine manufacturers giving machines to minister's wives because they felt that it would be good advertising (Jansen, pers. comm. 1996) By 1894 Sears and Roebuck was advertising three different brands of sewing machines in their catalog with prices ranging from twelve to fourteen dollars. Diamond Jenness, traveling with Iñupiaq people in 1913, observed daily life along the northern coast of Alaska. He noted at Cape Halkett, "Primus stoves, sewing machines, and white men's appertenances [*sic*] of every kind we noticed among them"(1991:18). And, at

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Iñupiaq seamstresses continue to use alder for this purpose. Ada and Gilbert Lincoln, from Anaktuvuk Pass, gathered and shredded several gallon ziplock bags of alder bark and took it to AFN(Alaska Federation of Natives meeting) to sell. I visited with them the first day of the craft market and they had sold all but one of the bags. The bags of bark were the first items that other Alaska Natives picked up and looked at when they approached the Lincoln's table, even though they were also displaying very nice masks and ivory fishing lures.

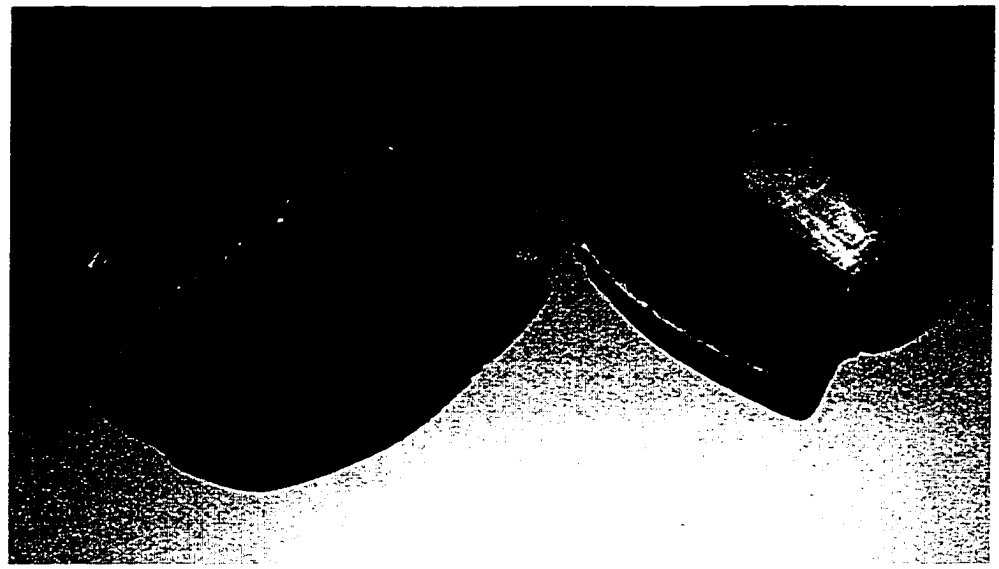

Figure 9. Slate and metal ulus.
Don Hurlbert photograph, Smithsonian Institution.

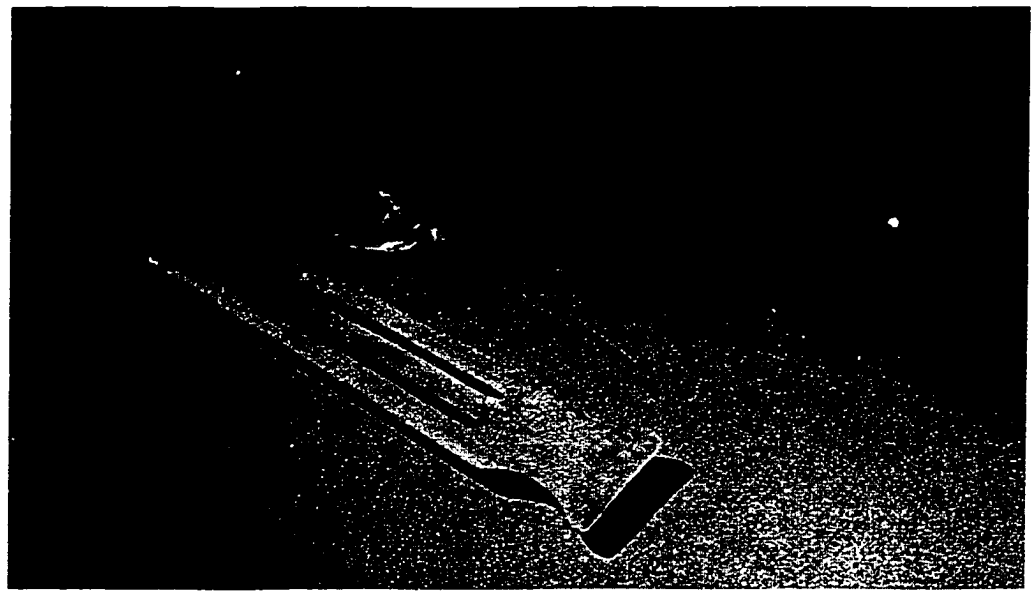

Figure 10. Needlecase with thimble, thimbleholder and needles.
Don Hurlbert photograph, Smithsonian Institution.

Teshekpuk Lake, "Inside the tent a few treasures were attached to the sticks of the frame-work or stowed at the side–an alarm clock; a rolled gold hunting watch; a fine sewing machine, etc. Everything was good, there were no cast-away articles"(Jenness 1991:56). He also comments on the ulu, "The ulo is an excellent tool for cutting skins–far better than scissors because it can cut slanting, and thereby enable two pieces to join together better" (1991:111). Hand crank sewing machines continue to be popular with seamstresses today (figure 11).

**Parka attributes**

Northern Alaskan skin parkas dating from 1882 to 1940 that I examined in museum collections exhibit many common structural and decorative features. All have dropped shoulders seams, most with trim set into the shoulder seams. Nearly all have hoods, and Alaskan parkas all have wolf and/or wolverine ruffs.[20] Most of the skin and fur parkas have hood roots. Men's parkas are hip length with a nearly straight hem, just slightly longer in back than in front. Women's parkas are longer, to the knee or slightly below, with curving front and back flaps (figure 12). Parkas from the Seward Peninsula and Kotzebue area, in the southwestern part of Iñupiaq territory, have bib-like flaps over the chest that can be tied up to protect the face. Koryak parkas from Siberia have the same flaps (figure 13, 14) (Jochelson 1908). Most of the parkas in the museum collections have some elements of decorative trim such

[20]Canadian parkas from before 1900, on the other hand, rarely have ruffs.

Figure 11. Emma Nachookpuk. Hand crank sewing machine. Point Hope 1968. (AMHA McC10073)

Figure 12. Male and Female parka styles. Edward Nelson photograph ca. 1881.

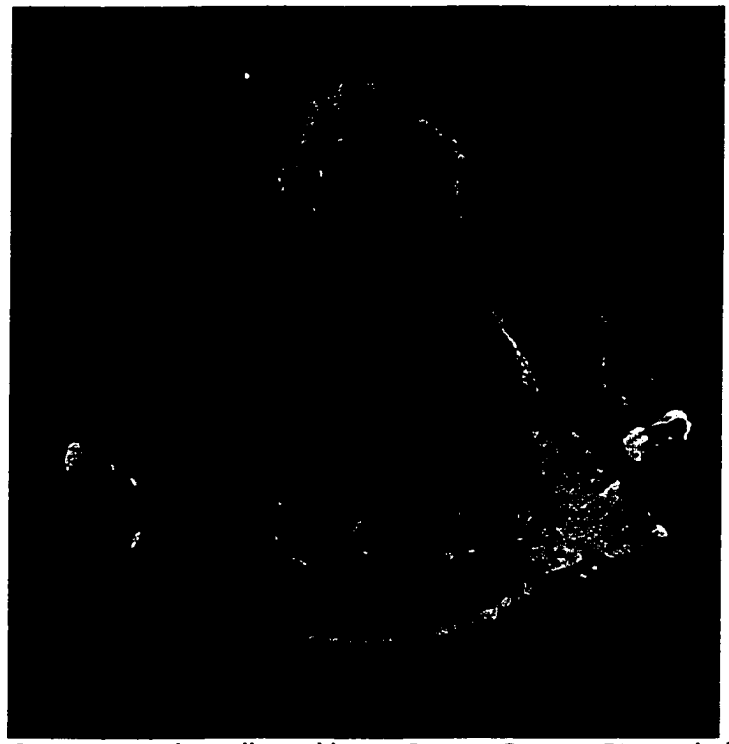

Figure 13. Parka collected by Lt. Stoney, Putnam River, Alaska, 1885. NMNH E127952

Figure 14 . Koryak parkas documented by Jochelson, ca. 1900.

as strips of contrasting colored skin, welts, and strips of wolverine. Trim was applied in locations including the hem of the garment, shoulder seams, cuffs, waist, hood, and along hood roots. Narrow strips of skin are attached as tassels in various locations, most commonly center back, shoulders, and at the points of the hood roots.

As contact with Euroamericans increased, trade opportunities grew and northern Alaskans found themselves able to acquire a broader range of goods. Before contact Iñupiat trade networks reached to other indigenous groups in Alaska, Canada and Siberia, supplying non-local indigenous goods and some Western items such as beads, knives and tobacco. Iñupiaq middlemen traveled throughout northern Alaska, attending the large trade fairs at Sheshalik on Kotzebue Sound and Nirlik at the mouth of the Colville River, and acquiring goods to trade elsewhere. Northwestern Alaskans, closest to Siberia, traded with the reindeer Chukchi and Siberian Eskimo through the Diomede Island and Seward Peninsula villages, exchanging Siberian reindeer skins, beads, knives, axes and other metal objects for Alaskan furs (Ray 1975, Schweitzer and Golovko n.d., VanStone 1984). Regional trade, and even the intercontinental trade with Siberia, however, did not supply enough goods of Euroamerican manufacture to influence Iñupiaq patterns of clothing production. Changes to Iñupiaq clothing did not come until after the whaling ships appeared on the scene.

**Introduction of Cloth**

With the influx of western goods that came with the whaling industry, the Iñupiat immediately adopted some new materials and technology including cloth, thread, and, when they became practical, sewing machines. Cloth was used to make covers (*atikluk)* for fur parkas. This extended the life of the fur parkas by protecting them from moisture and dirt (Driscoll 1983, Oakes 1988). According to Murdoch, a naturalist with the 1881 International Polar Expedition to Point Barrow: "Of late years both sexes have adopted the habit of wearing over their clothes a loose hoodless frock of cotton cloth, usually bright colored calico, especially in blustering weather, when it is useful in keeping the drifting snow out of their furs" (Murdoch 1988[1892]:111). Parka covers had also been adopted in Siberia: "In snowy weather the Chukchi often pull a smock of calico over their furs in order not to get them full of snow. They love bright colors. A group of Chukchi wearing their 'snow-covers' look very gay - blue, yellow, red, white, and flowered coats" (Sverdrup 1978:28). In Alaska, these cloth covers generally took the form of short hooded anoraks for the men and longer and hooded dress-like garments with ruffles at the bottom for women. Decorative trim was applied to the cloth parka covers (figures 15, 16).

Cloth parka covers were made from cotton drill, canvas or even flour sacks first brought by the whalers and later by traders. There was little variety in the fabrics first available to the Iñupiaq seamstresses and the earliest examples of parka covers are limited to plain white drill, a coarse striped cotton, or flour sacks. The 1895

Figure 15. Women wearing atikluks on the beach at Nome. (AMHA, Eide collection)

Figure 16. Man in parka cover, ca. 1923-24
Photograph by Edward L. Keithan, courtesy of Richard Keithan

volume of *The Eskimo Bulletin*, a newspaper published annually in Cape Prince of Wales includes the following in its fashion column:

> Took-twoi-na has a new pair of Safety-pin earrings. Ke-rook sports two of Dr. Drigg's glass bottle-stoppers for Labrets. Kum-nruk is out in new trowsers (sic) of the Finest Sperry's Flour cloth. A-yar-hok has a new overcloak of the fashionable "Dried Peaches" brand. He got the bags from a ship [Eskimo Bulletin 1893].

Early photographs show that most of the children in a family and even most of those in a school were outfitted in parka covers of the same, often plaid or striped, fabric design (figure 17).

**Gender**

Iñupiaq parkas and atikluk are constructed in very specific forms that, by shape alone, reference male and female roles. The forms of the garments have remained nearly unchanged since the mid-1800s. Men's garments are hip length, allowing for freedom of movement when hunting. Women's parkas reach below the knee. Historic female parkas were cut with rounded flaps in front and back, following the shape of a tanned caribou skin. Since the flaps curved up at the sides women were able to move freely. If the women were of childbearing age their parkas were constructed with extra room in the back and neck so that they could carry babies and small children. These parkas are called amaaġun in Iñupiaq. The children rode against the mother's back, supported by a strap that fastened in front of the mother's chest.

Figure 17. Inupiaq family on cargo/trading ship, ca. 1920. (IHLC Th282)

The parkas were so roomy that the mother was able to bring the child around to the front to nurse without exposing it to the cold (figure 18). Contemporary Iñupiaq women still carry children in their parkas, making special baby-carrying parkas and using belts or scarves to support the child. Women also carry children in other types of jackets, leaving them partially unfastened to accommodate the child's head (figures 18, 19).

The parka covers that Iñupiaq seamstresses began making after the introduction of cloth were ideal for negotiating the gender-specific dress requirements imposed by Western missionaries. The women's covers incorporated some of the details of Western women's clothing such as floral, plaid or stripe fabrics, deep ruffles at the hem and bands of decorative trim. Wearing these garments that had a dress-like appearance allowed Iñupiaq women to satisfy the missionaries without sacrificing the instrumental functionality of the indigenous parka. These covers (atikłuk) demonstrate one of the ways that the Iñupiat resolved conflicts between Western and indigenous values. Western proprieties were acknowledged and indigenous values retained by combining them into a new whole that functioned in the changed context.

As traders brought an ever increasing variety of fabrics to the north seamstresses had more choice and floral calicos became popular, especially for women's parka covers. Records from whaling ships illustrate the popularity of fabric as a trade item. One ship's cargo of trade goods, bound for Plover Bay (Siberia) in

Figure 18. Bertha Iyatunguq and child, Wales. Ca. 1923-24.
Edward L. Keithan photograph, courtesy of Richard Keithan

Figure 19. Fanny Akpik with her grandson. Barrow 1999.

1909, included 112 yards of calico, 161 yards of denim, 482 yards of drill, 1 sewing machine, 7 sewing machine needles, 46 thimbles, and 145 1/2 yards of ticking (Bodfish 1909). At first cloth parka cover trim was simple bands of contrasting fabric. When, in the late nineteenth century, commercially produced trim such as rickrack and braid became more readily available, Iñupiat women combined bias tape, rickrack, and embroidered ribbon to create pleasing and individual designs. Seamstresses adapted the geometric patterns associated with the skin parkas to cloth and executed them in bias tape, forming intricately patterned bands which echo those sewn of skin (figures 20, 21). All geometric designs for parka trim, whether skin or cloth, are called *qupak* in the Iñupiaq language. The same trim is called 'delta trim' by Inuit and Athabascan seamstresses in Canada, referring to the Mackenzie River delta located just east of the Alaska-Canada border (Oakes 1988, Thompson 1994).

In the 1950s Iñupiat seamstresses began using commercially available quilted, insulated lining material instead of caribou skin for the inner, warmth-providing layer of most parkas. This lining material was often ordered through the Sears and Montgomery Ward catalogs. Seamstresses also substituted purchased mouton (commercially tanned sheepskin) for the caribou skin lining of hunting parkas, mouton being more durable than caribou that loses its hair when wet.

The linings of contemporary Iñupiat hunting parkas are constructed of mouton and are sewn by hand using unwaxed dental floss or artificial sinew. The covers are made of canvas or heavy cotton twill. Winter versions are usually white for winter

Figure 20. Qupak trim in cloth.

Figure 21. Qupak trim in fur. NMNH 260638, ca. 1910

hunting (figure 22). Alternatively, some hunting parkas are made in other colors except red, which is thought to frighten the animals (Weber, pers. com. 1997). These parkas are made in the traditional anorak or pull-over style which retains warmth more efficiently than a parka with a front opening. Most women's parkas and men's town parkas are lined with quilted, nylon covered polyester insulation and zip up the front. These parkas are covered with richly colored cotton velveteen, corduroy, or calico. The men's parkas are always solid colors; women's are either solid or prints, generally following the fabric styles of the times. Today, older Iñupiaq women generally prefer larger brighter print patterns while younger women choose solids or smaller, more delicate prints. For instance, Vera Weber, a skilled young seamstress in Anaktuvuk Pass, Alaska, prefers small floral prints and looks for trim materials which will match and/or blend with the print. She notes that the older women in the community prefer trim colors that she feels clash with the parka fabric. Vera was given a parka belonging to one of her aunts whose cover is a bright lime-green fabric with lizard and frog designs (figures 23, 24). Although the parka is well made and has a beautiful sunshine ruff (made by piecing sections of fur together so they form a perfectly circular ring around the face of the wearer), Vera will not wear it, because she feels that it is too bright.

Figure 22. Hunting Parka.

Figure 23. Vera Weber wearing her aunt's parka, 1998.

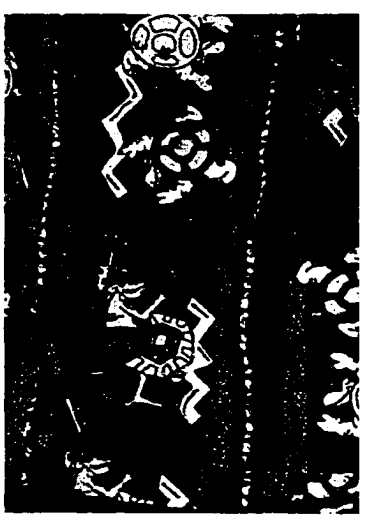

Figure 24. Fabric detail.

**Parka Trim**

One nearly universal element on all of the parkas and atikluk is decorative trim. On skin and fur parkas trim was applied at any or all locations including the hem, shoulder seams, waist, hood, and or hood roots. During the nineteenth century, trim included amulets, apparently worn to propitiate the animal spirits. As Captain Rochfort Maguire observed in Barrow in 1857:

> About their dresses they have also frequently the head and neck of a crow seen on the centre of the back - and on their breast large pieces of crystal. This custom we have frequently observed amongst them, and when they have been on board, they have frequently shown us small pieces of different coloured stones, and amber, sown about their dresses, that they suppose favour the chase of particular Animals - such as deer, and seals [Maguire 1988[1857]:210].

The most common trim on the oldest (1882) skin parkas in museum collections is a linear trim made of strips of trimmed white caribou skin one to three centimeters wide separated by four millimeter wide welts of lingcod (fish) or other dark, hairless skin. These welted strips are sewn together to create alternating lines of light and dark. Tiny pieces of red yarn are sewn along the wrong side of some of the seams with the yarn ends poking through the seams to the right side of the garment, creating dots of red color spaced almost invariably six millimeters apart along the welt (figures 25, 26). Most parkas use yarn for this effect but several parkas display the linear trim design but with beads or leather tabs sewn into the welt to make the dots

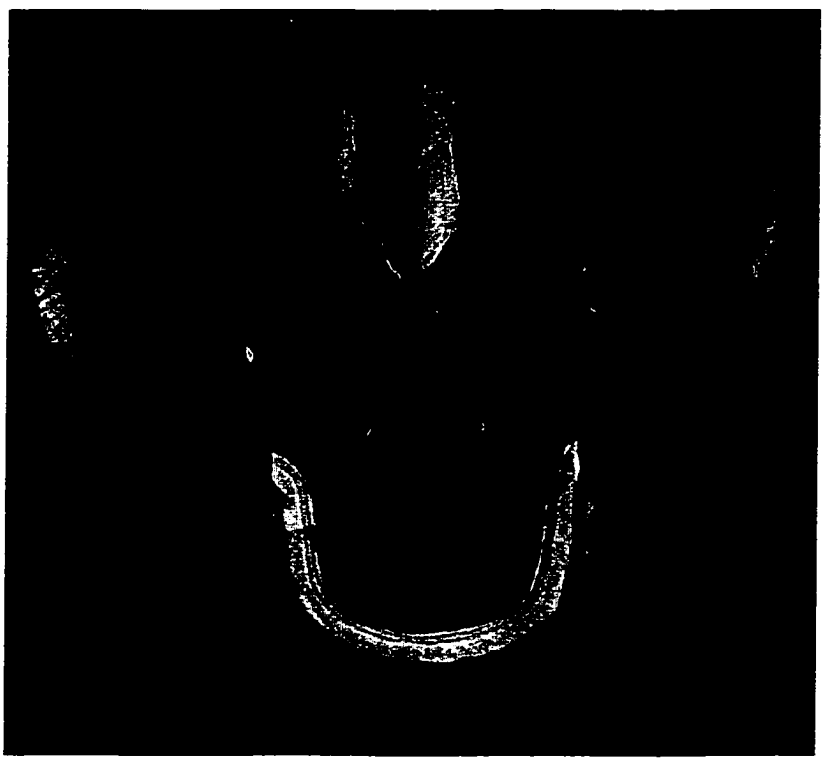

Figure 25. Parka with linear trim.

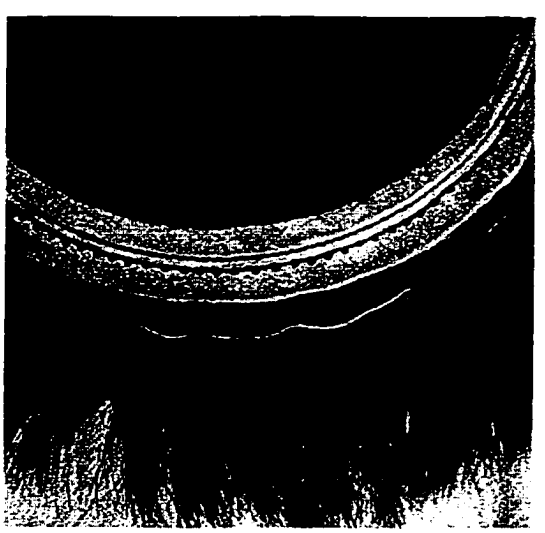

Figure 26. Linear trim detail.

instead of red yarn. Many of the pants, mukluks, gloves, and caps of the same age in the museum collections exhibit this same style of trim. In his account of the 1908 Stefansson-Anderson Arctic Expedition, Stefannson describes the same trim pattern on mukluks, noting that the dots were made from the patches of red skin above ptarmigan eyes.

> ...There was also a diagonal ornamentation on the outside of each boot leg. This consisted of two outside strips of white caribou belly skin about half an inch wide, a middle white stripe about 1/5 inch wide, and two 1/8 or 1/10 inch wide strips of black caribou skin separating the three white stripes. Along the upper edge of the lowest white stripe was a row of red dots made of the red skin found above the eyes of the willow ptarmigan...[Stefansson 1914].

This trim design bears a decided resemblance to the decorative elements on Punuk, Okvik and Ipiutak artifacts that date from approximately 500 to 1500 years ago. Many of the brow bands (decorated flat strips of ivory worn on the head) in Giddings (1964:98) display parallel lines with perpendicular tick marks at precise intervals and/or geometric patterns of light and dark squares within parallel lines (figure 27). While speculative, this convergence of design over a thousand-year period provides food for thought about the conservative nature of design traditions.

Geometrically patterned light and dark trim first decorated Iñupiaq skin parkas in the late 1890s.[21] It was made by sewing small geometrically shaped pieces of white

[21]Geometric trim is found earlier on Koryak and Chukchi garments (Jochelson 1908).

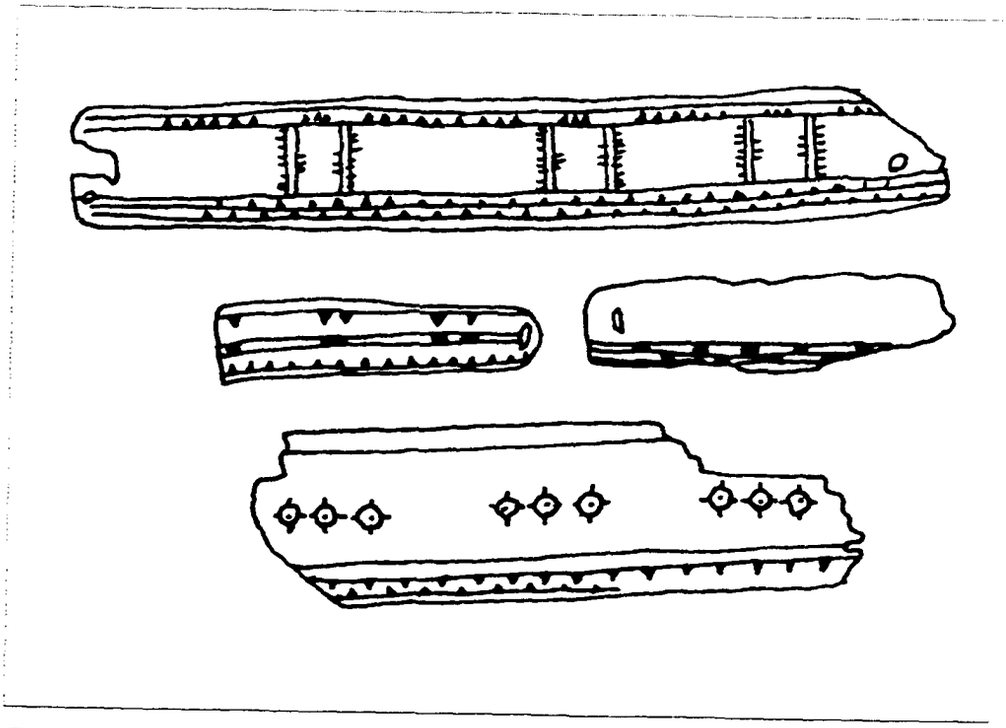

Figure 27. Brow band designs. (After Giddings 1964)

and dark brown caribou skin together to make patterned strips. These strips were placed on the parkas in the same locations as the earlier linear trim or they were used in combination with the linear trim. Seamstresses incorporated non-indigenous materials such as beads, colored felt, and decorative braid into their trim designs as they became available. The tireless efforts and creativity of women who designed the many variations of this geometric trim are evident in the parkas in historic photographs and museum collections. One parka from Point Hope (Anchorage Museum of History and Art) has pieces of skin just 5 mm square that are stitched together to form a checkerboard pattern (figure 28). As garments became worn, the bands of qupak were removed and used on new garments.[22] Christian Klengenberg, a trader who married Qimniq, an Iñupiaq woman from Wainwright, comments on the fluctuating fashions in parka trim:

> The girls came [to a dance at Point Hope] in their best clothes; all made of skins which they had labored over and sewn during the summer for the winter styles. Of course the general shape of their garments in the Arctic does not change, but the trimmings and the colour of the ornamental furs and the way these are attached and the fancy work which goes with them do change quite a but from winter to winter, and the women seem to know through the summer just what the most fetching mode will be for the next winter...One year the girls

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Both the National Museum of Natural History and the Anchorage Museum of History and Art have examples of detached skin qupak in their collections. AMHA also has some made from cloth and bias tape. It is common to find bands of cloth qupak for sale in the craft sections of village stores in northern Alaska.

Figure 28. Trim on parka from Pt. Hope. AMHA.

> will be wanting still-born caribou calf that looks like seal but is darker. Another year all the trimming must be ermine, and the next dark wolf, and the next red fox, and so on. Even if their poor fathers must reach down so far south as Great Slave Lake to get what they want. Skin clothes will take all of a summer to make daintily, what with tanning, and selecting trimmings to match for mukluks and mittens and parka (Klengenberg 1936:74).

Figure 29 is of Klengenberg's wife and two daughters.

**Changes in Form and Context**

Parka materials changed significantly during the period from 1880 to the present; the patterns of the garments also changed, but to a lesser extent. Women's parkas lost the curved flaps in front and behind and, with the adoption of cloth and quilted linings, the hood roots connecting the hood to the body of the garment disappeared. The overall shape of the parkas remained the same, including such details as the dropped shoulder seams and the women's hood with the peak on top (*kavraq*) and pouch behind the neck (*kimminnaq*).[23]

During this period, the variety of contexts in which the garments were used increased greatly due to the expansion of social and environmental situations resulting from contact with western culture. Where the primary purpose of the

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Several older Iñupiaq women have told me that when they were girls they used to hide their gum in the kavraq, or peak of their hoods, so that they could chew it later.

Figure 29. Christian Klengenberg Family, ca. 1924.
National Archives of Canada, PA-172875

garments had originally been to protect the wearers from the weather, to identify them with a particular group and, for women, to carry a babies, they now acquired additional functions. Iñupiaq people found themselves in new social and environmental situations in which parkas developed further uses, both functional and aesthetic.

The imposition of the moral code of Western religion and education required that the Iñupiat conform to new standards of dress and cleanliness (figures 30, 31). Fur garments, while acknowledged by Euroamericans to be superior for outer wear, were not acceptable as indoor clothing because they were too warm, often carried lice, and had overtones of 'savagery'. Nor did Euroamericans condone the precontact Iñupiat practice of removing all upper garments when indoors. (Historically, Inuit residences tended to become overheated due to small spaces, the presence of stone lamps and minimal ventilation.) The cloth covers, initially made to protect the fur parkas, solved the problem. They could be worn without the fur parka underneath and would then function as a shirt or dress, keeping the wearer comfortable and at least minimally satisfying the requirements of the missionaries. The calico covers gave Iñupiaq women the appearance of wearing dresses without their having to sacrifice the practicality of the loose fit and shorter length that allowed them to perform their

Figure 30. Inupiaq woman in Western dress, 1892. (Image from Bockstoce 1986)


Figure 31. 1900 Sears Roebuck catalog.

domestic responsibilities.[24] In all, the covers or atikluks, solved the clothing dilemma from both Western and Iñupiaq perspectives.

**Contemporary Practice**

*We just look at the parkies and we know where they come from.*

*—Ruth Outwater 1999*

Contemporary Iñupiat use parkas in a variety of circumstances today. Seamstresses make hunting parkas of commercially purchased mouton with canvas or cotton duck covers. These pullover styles are usually not decorated. They also sew more decorative 'town' parkas for men, women and children. These garments are insulated with quilted polyester lining and have corduroy, velveteen or calico covers. Men's versions usually have wolf ruffs, whereas women's have wolf or, more commonly, wolverine or fox ruffs. The cuffs and hems of men's parkas are trimmed with wolverine; though women's commonly have wide beaver cuffs and wolverine at the hem. Both men's and women's are usually trimmed with geometric qupak trim or, at the least, a strip of embroidered ribbon sewn around the bottom of the garment. Many of the more elaborate garments have qupak trim in combination with rickrack, twisted baby rickrack, and/or the decorative stitches made with the

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Euroamerican dress styles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were restrictive and impractical from an Iñupiaq woman's viewpoint. Skirts fell to the floor and bodices were constricted by firmly boned corsets. Iñupiaq women could not have performed the responsibilities required by their arctic lifestyle if they were dressed in Euroamerican fashions.

embroidery capabilities of newer sewing machines. The trim designs are distinctive and Iñupiaq observers can nearly always identify the home village of the seamstress by their style. Moreover, many seamstresses can often tell which seamstress sewed a parka by the workmanship and trim design. This ease of identification is not easily conveyed through description of design components, however. It is springs more from an intimate familiarity with subtle nuances of form and design. I often asked women to describe the details that allowed them to identify the parka's origin but the answers were generally vague, such as, 'well, they just do those kind of open designs with rickrack in Kaktovik' or, 'those little squares [of qupak] are Barrow-style'. As I spent more time in northern Alaska, I found that I could begin to identify where the makers of some garments were from. In doing so I realize that I was using the same recognition of a cluster of attributes that I use when I am able to identify a painting by an artist whose other work I am familiar with.

Fur parkas, known as 'traditional' parkas, are still being made by Iñupiaq women. Most are constructed from arctic ground squirrel (*Spermophilus parryii*; *siksrik* in Iñupiaq) or from muskrat skins. The construction of these garments requires an immense commitment of time on the part of the seamstress. The small squirrel or muskrat skins must be either purchased or acquired by trapping and then tanned. They are then cut and stitched together to form the larger pieces that make up various parts of the parka. The garments are usually elaborately trimmed with strips of wolverine, intricately pieced white and brown calf skin qupak trim and sometimes

beadwork. The hoods are set into the garment using the hood roots typical of the historic parkas in museum collection (e.g. NMNH 176105, figure 32, and figure 33). Seamstresses sometimes incorporate the same linear trim designs with the evenly spaced tabs of red yarn or beads that are found on the older garments in museum collections.

Fur parkas are no longer worn for everyday purposes, rather they are brought out for special occasions such as parka competitions, beauty pageants, parades and festivals (figure 34). Women take great pride in their creation of fur parkas and often make one for each of their children. For instance, Frances Johnson, an elder from Cape Darby, Seward Peninsula, made seven fancy squirrel skin parkas for family members, trapping and tanning all of the skins herself.[25] Her daughter told me that the fancy parkas were status objects because they signified that one's family could afford to take the time to make them. She said that when her mother talked about people who were wealthy she meant that they had enough food, guns and clothing so that they did not have to struggle to live. These parkas continue to be status garments; Pearl and several of her siblings worn their parkas in a parade in Nome, winning an award from the mayor.

The unlined atikluk is worn on a daily basis in all Iñupiaq villages in northern

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As Bodenhorn (1990) notes, Iñupiaq women participated both physically and spiritually in all aspects of hunting, including whaling and using a rifle to shoot caribou or other large animals. She discusses the interchangeability of roles: "Men and women are not thought to be somehow congenitally incapable of doing something generally assigned to a member of the opposite sex"(1990:8).

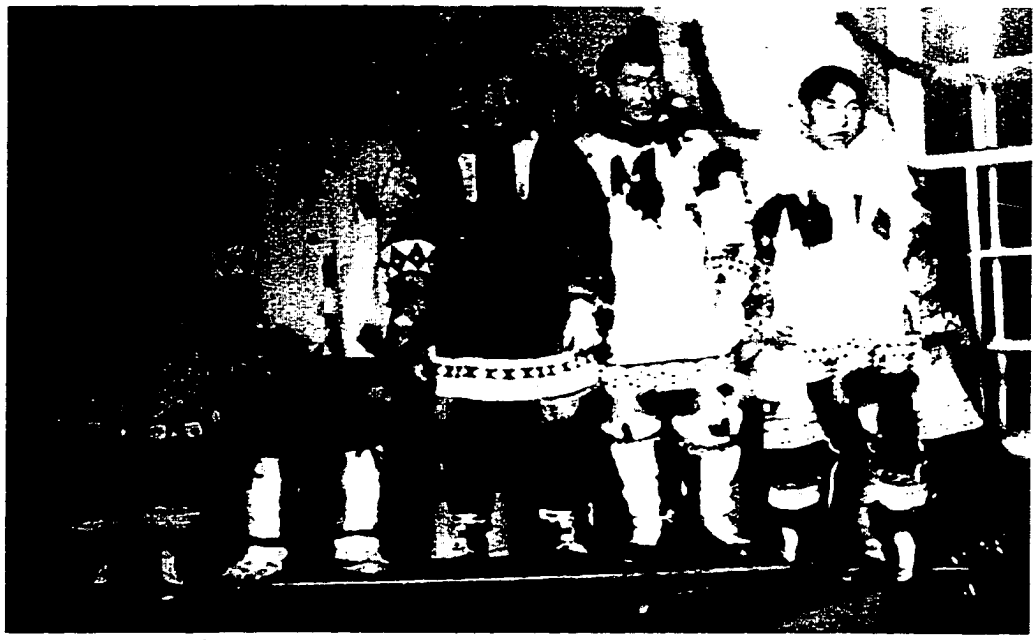

Figure 32. Reindeer Fair in Nome, ca. 1914-16.
AMHA Cochrane B81.164.109

Figure 33. Pearl in fur parka. Parka made by her mother, Frances Johnson. Photo taken in 1999.


Figure 34. Miss World Eskimo Olympics contestants.

Alaska. These garments, constructed for women out of calico prints and for men out of solid colored sail cloth or cotton duck, are worn in many ordinary circumstances. In the villages atikluks are the mainstay of the daily wardrobe of older women. Younger and middle-aged women wear either atikluks or mainstream contemporary garments like jeans, slacks or dresses. Men also wear atikluks on a daily basis. Atikluks for men are either pull-over anorak style or zip up the front and are often worn over a shirt as a light jacket or instead of a sport coat. Iñupiaq people wear atikluks to meetings or conferences, in particular when the meeting involves issues pertaining to Iñupiaq culture. In these instances the atikluk is a statement of Iñupiaq identity and, in recent years, a statement of Native sovereignty and symbol of self-determination. In the past decade a dual statement of identity and tradition is being made through the garments that Iñupiaq brides are choosing for their weddings.

**'Traditional' Iñupiaq Weddings**

In northern Alaska, contemporary Iñupiaq Eskimo weddings reflect the intermingling of indigenous and introduced influences. Recently many Iñupiat are choosing to have what they term 'traditional Iñupiaq weddings,' in which the participants wear Iñupiaq-style clothing instead of the standard dress of Western weddings. The ceremonies and associated attire worn at these 'traditional' weddings are not derived from long standing Iñupiaq practices, however. Instead, they are a new phenomenon springing as much from Euroamerican influences as from

indigenous historical or prehistorical traditions. Regardless of the ceremonies' lineage however, the Iñupiaq people claim them as 'traditional'.

Since the first actual wedding ceremonies between Iñupiaq couples were introduced events associated with Christianity, there was no earlier indigenous practice to cite as a 'traditional' ceremony. In the 1890s, White missionaries performed the earliest religious weddings which followed the prerequisite liturgical and cultural forms. The only models of wedding ceremonies that Native people had were the occasional weddings between non-native teachers, missionaries, miners and traders.

Historical photographs illustrate the wedding clothing that was worn by Euroamerican couples around the turn of the century. The brides were garbed in the long white wedding gowns and the grooms in dark suits with stiff collars and ties, styles that, with slight variations, have persisted in general American culture to the present day (figure 35). Most of the non-native Americans who came to Alaska in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries consciously brought civilization with them, importing as many aspects of 'civilized' life as they could. They brought household and personal objects with them and had more shipped. For instance, a nurse working in Gambell, on St. Lawrence Island, had a piano sent to her. It traveled by ship and dog team to her home. She describes using a white lace tablecloth and pewter candlesticks for dinner parties. A list of food brought north by a teacher from the village of Wales includes tins of raspberries, white figs, minced clams, oysters, and

Figure 35. Wedding in Valdez, ca. 1909.
AMHA B62.1A.484

asparagus, pints of orange juice, jars of jam and India relish, tinned lobster, bottles of maraschino cherries, and tubes of food coloring paste (Richards 1908).

Newcomers continued their usual activities too, hosting dinners, card parties, and social visits–all in the manner of American society of the era. Weddings, when they occurred, followed suit as an occasion for special clothing and celebration. This microcosm of American society, transplanted from the lower forty-eight, was the model for indigenous Alaskans who were strongly encouraged, if not forced, to conform.

The earliest photographs of Iñupiaq weddings show the bride, groom and wedding party in atikluks. Even non-native preachers wear fancy parkas in some of the images (figure 36). As clothing became more available through mail order and stores, Iñupiaq couples followed Western styles and wore white dresses and suits for their weddings. In the 1950s and 60s Iñupiaq brides walked down the aisle wearing the short, bouffant wedding dresses of the era (figure 37). Ada Lincoln, of Anaktuvuk Pass, tells of Gilbert, her fiancee, purchasing her dress for her in Fairbanks. She said that since she did not get to try it on it was pretty tight but that she managed to wear it.

The practice of wearing standard white gowns continued into the 1980s and, to some extent, into the present (figure 38). In the 1980s however, an alternative trend appeared. Many Iñupiat began replacing the traditional American wedding clothing with fancy *atikluks* made especially for the ceremony. Although everyday

Figure 36. Wedding in Wainwright, Alaska, 1921.
AMHA B81.164.36

Figure 37. 1960s wedding in Barrow. IHLC photograph.

Figure 38. Vera and Bill Weber's wedding, 1980s.

*atikluks* had occasionally been worn for weddings when a couple wished to avoid the time and expense of a big church wedding, the fancy *atikluks* were a new twist. These garments replaced the white wedding gown but were created out of satins and laces–fabrics that were uncommon for everyday *atikluks* but that were identical to those used for standard wedding and attendants' gowns. The ceremonies themselves were unchanged but acquired a new label; based on the clothing they were called 'traditional Iñupiaq' weddings. These ceremonies continue to grow in popularity in northern Alaska.

Just as the details of Western wedding ceremonies vary, 'traditional Iñupiaq' ceremonies vary also. The one constant defining the ceremony is the bride's atikluk. Sewn by her or by relatives or friends, it follows the form of everyday atikluks but details are changed, according to the bride's desires. The garment may be longer, the pockets may be omitted, and the trimming is usually more elaborate. White satin is often used for the bride's atikluk, sometimes with lace overlays (figure 39). Attendants' atikluks (including flower girls) are generally all the same color and are either satin or, for winter weddings, velvet (figure 40). The groom and groomsmen either wear atikluks in matching or complementary colors or standard suits or tuxedos. Other than the clothing, the ceremony does not deviate from the standard Euroamerican wedding. Common practices include the procession down the aisle, the religious ceremony, the reception following, the throwing of the bouquet and garter, and the gifts. The ceremonies use Christian liturgy and follow the standard

Figure 39. Traditional Inupiaq Wedding. Hopson-Rochon wedding, 1990s.

Figure 40. Hopson-Rochon wedding party.

practices of most of American society. Only the clothing transforms them into 'traditional Iñupiaq' weddings (figure 41).

The desire for a 'traditional' wedding is not limited to the Iñupiat but is known in other indigenous groups as well. One Iñupiaq bride said that she and her husband, an Athabascan Indian from Fort Yukon, had planned to have a 'traditional Indian' wedding. The groom's family was going to sew the necessary fringed and beaded moosehide garments for the wedding party but something came up and they were unable to provide the garments. At the last minute the bride's family stepped in and sewed Eskimo garments for all participants, making a lace atikluk for the bride, a white satin atikluk trimmed with blue qupak for the groom, and matching pale blue satin atikluks for all of the attendants and groomsmen including the flower girl and ring bearer (figures 42, 43).

The phenomena of 'traditional Iñupiaq' weddings and their delineation through clothing are significant on several levels. First, the fact that clothing alone, and female clothing in particular, suffices to shift the status of a ceremony from contemporary to traditional demonstrates the continuing importance of clothing within Iñupiaq culture. These weddings reveal that the actions of women continue to be pivotal in defining Iñupiaq events, particularly one with spiritual implications. If the women wear atikluk, the wedding is 'traditional', regardless of what the men wear. In historical times Iñupiaq clothing practices, controlled by women and associated with environment, subsistence and spirituality, insured that women and

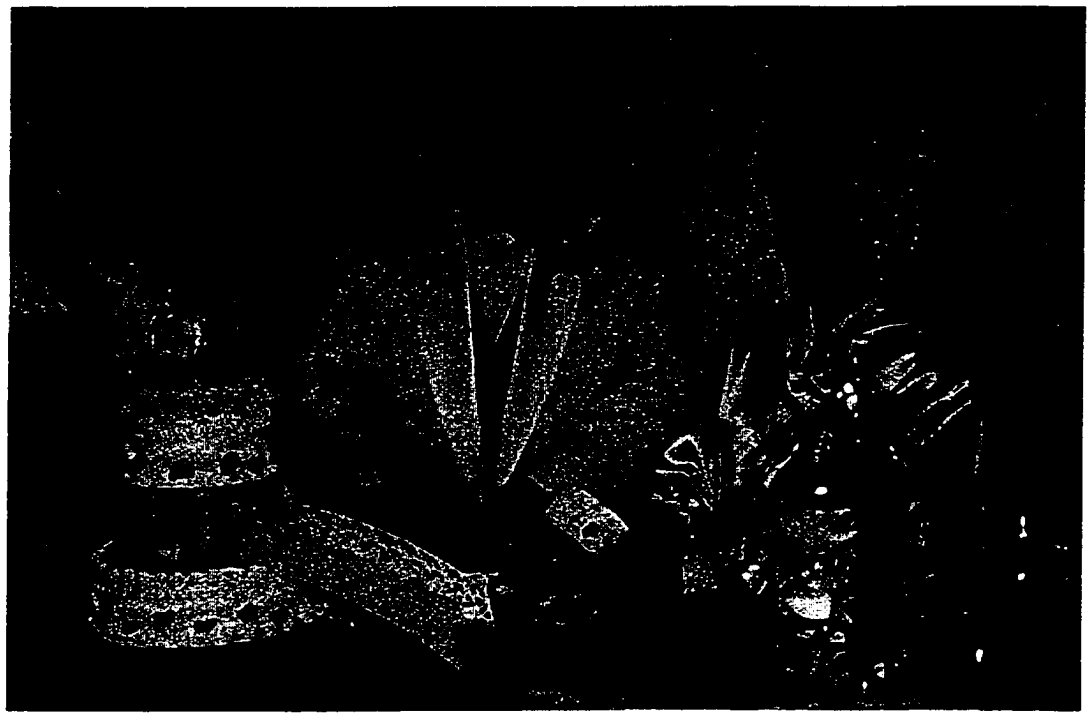

Figure 41. Wedding cake. Hopson-Rochon wedding.

Figure 42. Traditional Inupiaq wedding in Anaktuvuk Pass. Harriet and Earl Williams,1999.

Figure 43. Harriet and Earl Williams wedding.

clothing held a central role in the Iñupiaq social system. Despite changes in social, cultural and economic conditions, the relationship between clothing and Iñupiaq values has not only continued but has developed more complexities as clothing has acquired additional functions and meanings within contemporary contexts.

'Traditional' weddings reveal the ongoing, incremental balancing of Iñupiaq and Western values. The imposition of Western culture that began 150 years ago was not as all-encompassing as it may appear in the face of expanding globalization of material culture. Iñupiaq values survived the onslaught of introduced ideas and, in fact, tailored many features of Euroamerican culture to suit Iñupiaq needs. Contemporary Iñupiaq wedding ceremonies, performed in churches with Christian liturgy, are more than an acquiescence to, or reflection of, colonially imposed religious mores. They fit into the category of cultural performances, in the sense that Victor Turner (1987) discusses in examining modes of symbolic action. Cultural performances relate to the everyday economic, domestic, political or legal processes of a group and do not only reflect the social system. Instead they are reflexive and may even comment on the society of origin, providing an opportunity for the group to evaluate and change its view of history. Such performances are 'contested ideological terrain' that may express tradition, ethnicity, and/or resistance against the dominant culture (Guss 2000:8). The Iñupiaq adoption of Western wedding ceremonies may be viewed as cultural performance reflecting Iñupiaq acceptance of Christian religion. As the changing nature of these performances indicates, however,

this acceptance was not unconditional, nor was it final. Both adherence to the doctrine and compliance with the social forms of the ceremonies have remained malleable.

Even though the Iñupiat generally embraced Christian doctrine (replacing shamanistic beliefs that may have been more disturbing than comforting), many have interpreted Christianity to accommodate Iñupiaq values. An example is the practice of having children before marriage. Although missionaries stressed the importance of marriage before a couple took up residence together, the Iñupiaq practice of couples living together without a formal ceremony has continued, supported by the strong cultural valuing of children and family. Historically, after receiving Christian teaching, couples sought out a preacher or magistrate to perform the required ceremony but they did not necessarily wait to consummate their marriage until after the ceremony. Many brides were pregnant or had already had one or more children by the time of their weddings. There were no negative social repercussions for this practice. As noted earlier, the valuing of children and acceptance of them regardless of the marital status of their parents was a long-standing Iñupiaq practice. Many recently married Iñupiaq women have told me that they were pregnant at the time of their weddings. One couple had already had five children when they decided to wed. All of the women in my study discussed this with laughter and several mentioned the difficulty of making a dress or *atikluk* to accommodate their pregnancy. Although they acknowledged that the church disapproved, none indicated that they believed that

being pregnant before the wedding was wrong.

After 1850, the Iñupiat were introduced to technological, ideological and social aspects of Western culture. Benefits accrued to those who embraced the new social regime and complied with its various educating, civilizing and proselytizing agendas. Compliance was rapid; albeit not really a situation of choice. The acceptance of a Western wedding ceremony was an artifact of the imposition of Euroamerican culture on Alaska. The transformation of the ceremony into an 'Iñupiaq' ritual reflects an increasing awareness on the part of the Iñupiat that they are able to renegotiate the conditions of their imposed assimilation. Recent changes in the social and political environment of the United States, as well as Alaska, have empowered ethnic groups, particularly indigenous peoples, and have fostered a political climate favorable to claims of ethnic identity and self-determination. The adoption of Iñupiaq clothing for weddings during the past decade reflects the increasingly politicized climate of Alaska, one that favors Native self-determination and demonstrates ethnic groups' increasing unwillingness to conform to dictated Western policies.

Iñupiaq people feel that in transforming their wedding clothing to 'traditional' garments they are renegotiating their relationship to Western society and inventing a new, self-determined synthesis of Iñupiaq and Western values. As Jana Harcharek (per.com. 2001) told me when asked why people were having 'traditional' weddings, "People are realizing that they don't have to assimilate. They have adapted

enough–they don't want to change more. They are making a statement."

**Function**

Parkas may be synonymous with Eskimo-ness for non-Natives but for the Iñupiat they are more than a symbol. They are an integral part of Iñupiaq life. The whole practice of making, giving, and wearing parkas, with its subsistence and kinship connotations, is part of the integrated whole that is Iñupiat culture. People do not wear parkas only to communicate who they are, they wear them because of who they are and to activate certain relationships within their world. How can we understand Iñupiaq clothing, in particular the parka, in its cultural/contextual role? How does it function as both symbol and agent?

Although the common tendency in considering colonialist situations such as that of mid-nineteenth century northern Alaska would be to look at the influence of Euroamericans on Iñupiat people, it is important to step back and see the process of cultural contact as an interaction of variables within a system--each influences every other. The question becomes more one of magnitude and direction of change rather than an external force acting on an assumed static entity. We tend to view Iñupiaq culture as static before contact, extending back in time for a thousand years. This perception of stability is partially due to our lack of information about the prehistoric period and our tendency to collapse what little we do have into a single picture, frozen in time. Enter Euroamericans, center of their own world, bringing civilization

to the north. In their version of the story they create the action, the changes. An Iñupiaq point of view is different. They lived in their own cultural milieu and chose, rejected or modified the elements of our culture that they found useful. This is, of course, also too simplistic since Western culture certainly was, to some extent, forced upon Iñupiaq people. But it is useful to try to balance the two viewpoints and to realize that the truth lies somewhere in between. So, within this systemic framework, I will discuss the roles of Iñupiaq clothing.

**Environmental Function**

Although clothing functions on several levels within the Iñupiat cultural system, the most obvious is that of protection in the arctic climate. If the clothing cannot protect the wearers from the cold, precipitation and other trials of the region then humans cannot survive and the whole system of human occupation of the region fails.

The husband-as-hunter and wife-as-seamstress relationship perfectly solved the problem of survival in the severe climate of the arctic. The seamstress' skill and the tailored garments she made out of the raw materials provided by her husband allowed human life to flourish in a challenging environment. Wearing the warm, intricately constructed garments made by his wife, the Iñupiaq hunter could venture out onto the tundra to hunt for the animals that provided both food and clothing. In a classic scenario that raises the question of which came first, or at least comments on

the circular relationship between them, the hunter acquired the animal skins that the seamstress turned into clothing that allowed the hunter to hunt. Hunters spent long hours outdoors--they had to be able to stay warm whether they were waiting motionless at a seal's breathing hole, walking long distances over the tundra in search of caribou, or waiting out a blizzard far from home. The sophisticated sewing techniques and garment designs of Iñupiaq seamstresses met these challenges thereby resolving one of the most critical problems of arctic life.

All arctic peoples had these same climate-related problems to resolve so it is not surprising that pre-contact Iñupiaq clothing shares many common features with the clothing of other arctic people (Borgoras 1909, Hatt 1969[1914], Nelson 1983[1899]). The most widely shared elements in arctic clothing design are those of tailoring and layering. Tailoring the garments--fitting them to the body through shaping and stitching--reduces the free flow of air past the body, minimizing heat loss. Layers of garments allow air to be trapped, warmed and held adjacent to the body as an extra insulating layer. Fitted shoulders, arms and hoods keep the warmed air from rising out of the garment (Stefansson 1955). Tailored, layered garments, modified by local conditions and availability of materials, were elaborately developed by indigenous seamstresses across the North.

Gudmund Hatt, in his pioneering study of arctic clothing notes, "Nowhere does nature make such great demands on clothing as in the arctic region. When the most important function of clothing is considered, i.e., to protect the body from harsh

climate, there is reason to regard arctic skin clothing as a highly developed form" (Hatt 1969[1914]:5). The northern regions of North America and Asia, where mean temperatures are -35C to -45C respectively, fostered the development of a clothing system that maximized the insulative qualities of locally available skins and furs. Caribou and, in Eurasia, reindeer were the most important materials for arctic clothing. Widely available, these skins were particularly efficient for warm clothing because the individual hairs on the skin are hollow and do not conduct heat. The properties of the skins varied according to the age of the animal and the time of year of harvest. Thus caribou calves, with their fine light hair, were harvested in the late summer and were used for undergarments, men's summer atigis and women's clothing. During the winter two layers of atigi would be worn, the inner with the hair side in and the outer, of heavier adult caribou skin, with the hair side out. This layered clothing strategy efficiently retained warmth by trapping air between the inner and outer skins. This system of insulative clothing prevailed throughout the arctic, reaching from Greenland across Canada and Alaska and into Eurasia. Although the patterns, decoration and even materials used for garments varied, the basic system of tailored, layered garments was ubiquitous.

The environmental function of Inupiat clothing underlies any analysis of its place in the culture. To a certain extent, pre-contact Inupiat clothing was as it was because it functioned in the environment and met people's needs for protection from the elements and could be constructed from available materials. But clothing

design decisions were never that simple. This is demonstrated by the array of clothing forms and stylistic variations across the arctic. From eastern Siberian across Alaska and Canada to Greenland, people, in particular coastal dwellers, shared a common environment with access to common materials. Yet historical and ethnographic evidence demonstrate a striking array of highly disparate solutions to the common problem of protecting the body in the climate. Parkas are long, short, fringed, tailed, narrow or broad shouldered, hooded or not, trimmed or plain. They are made of caribou, seal, polar bear, eider, ground squirrel and muskrat and they are trimmed with wolf, wolverine, fox, dog, ermine, reindeer, Dall sheep and ptarmigan. Many of the variations in garment form are not apparently environmentally functional. The wide neck openings and long wide sleeves of the Chukchi women's combination suits, for example. Or the very short fronts and long tails of the Copper Inuit parkas. The diversity of forms suggests that other variables must have operated in tandem with environmental functionality. The variations in form are clues that point to different roles involving social structure, ethnicity and identity.

**Social Role of Clothing**

The essential function of physical survival cannot be separated from the interwoven mesh of collective responsibilities and mutual aid that constituted the social system of the north Alaskan Eskimo. In a real sense parkas embody that system in that they are agents that actively active participate in its operation. They are

constructed by women as physical and spiritual elements of the system. By allowing hunters to hunt and by mediating human/animal interactions they maintain key Iñupiaq relationships–within the family, the community and the environment. In this role clothing is an actor in a cultural performance–one that is performed for an audience that is primarily the members of the culture itself. As Leach (1976: 45) observes in his analysis of ritual action, "We engage in rituals in order to transmit collective messages to ourselves." Iñupiaq clothing, in particular parkas, are an everyday enactment of Iñupiaq values and cultural meaning. Created in response to the essential need to relate to the particular physical and social environment and evolving as that environment changed, the garments carry layers of meaning and require particular actions of their wearers. Parkas reference the male/female/animal relationship and its associated kinship/sharing/mutual aid responsibilities that shape Iñupiaq social structure. Women and the clothing they make have sustained this age-old system to the present and contemporary women continue to feel that one of their most important responsibilities is to make sure that their families have clothing to keep them warm (Harcharek, pers. com. 2000).

Bodenhorn (1988) argues that rapid cultural change is, in itself, an insufficient cause for the stress that less developed societies experience when faced with contact with modern industrial states. Rather than change alone, it is the loss of ability to choose that is so stressful and destructive. In the case of the Iñupiat, their cultural history has been a process of adapting to technological and ecological change,

changes wrought by environment as well as by contact with other human groups. Contact with Euroamericans brought change that was different from previous change in one important respect, because of its intensity it denied the Iñupiat complete control over their situation and removed some of their ability to choose. The key element in successful adaptation to rapid change, Bodenhorn believes, is the element of choice. If members of a society have the autonomy to chose to maintain the parts of their life that provide meaning, then they will be able to adjust to changes in other parts of their lives. For the Iñupiat, maintenance of the subsistence system has been a choice that they made in spite of constant pressure to the contrary. By choosing to retain the subsistence system of hunting, sharing, and sewing they keep the ability to acquire not only the nutritional sustenance of Native food that they need and desire but also the meaningful human/animal/environment interrelationship that is the foundation of their culture. The ability to choose, and to defend that choice over time, has perhaps helped to buffer the disruptive effect of the overall change.

**Clothing, Identity and Ethnicity**

*We eat a lot of Native food and we think like Natives. But I'm not pure Native because my grandfather was white. I'm not white either.*

*-Pearl Sedaka 1999*

Identity and the related concept of ethnicity are important factors in understanding the role of clothing in Iñupiaq life. In the realm of identity, Leach's

(1976) point that objects have both communicative and technical (active) aspects becomes evident. An object may symbolize a particular identity (communicative aspect) and, in so doing, elicits certain responses (technical aspect) to that identification. In the case of Iñupiaq clothing, parkas and other garments communicate Iñupiaq identity in the symbolic sense but also activate responses that *do* something. The responses may operate in more than one realm, as well. Identification will receive different responses depending upon the context of the situation. In Alaska today parkas are worn to claim indigenous rights to emphasize the priority that Native Alaskans feel is their due, particularly in land and resource related issues.

Barth (1969) and Spicer (1980) point out that the boundary markers of ethnic groups are often created from pre-existing cultural traditions and this is evident in the case of the Iñupiat. Iñupiaq clothing, in particular parkas, signifies Iñupiaq identity through its distinctive design. Design details have modified over time but present-day garments display a traceable evolutionary relationship to parkas from the time of contact and before. As the social environment of northern Alaska changed during the last 150 years, the messages that the garments conveyed also changed–adjusting to the need of the given moment. An understanding of context is essential to an understanding of the communicatory and identifying roles of clothing. Changes in clothing materials, design and use are indicators of the changing influences on Iñupiaq life. Tracing clothing changes illuminates the social and economic forces that

affected Iñupiaq culture during the period.

As seen in chapter two, northern Alaska was isolated from outside contact before 1848. Intercontinental trade was conducted through Chukchi or Eskimo middlemen or at annual trading fairs. Most Iñupiat did not have significant contact with other Native groups or Europeans outside of this intermittent exchange of goods. Pre-1880 clothing reflects this insularity.

Until the advent of commercial whaling north of Bering Strait, Iñupiaq clothing was apparently uniform in style and decoration across northern Alaska. Burch (1998) argues that Iñupiaq region was subdivided into smaller Iñupiaq nations that were often at war with each other, but there is no evidence that those groups used clothing to distinguish themselves from each other. Clothing evidence from the pre-contact period does not indicate much design differentiation among the geographic territories of these nations. Although there is some differentiation between the Kotzebue Sound area and the rest of northern Alaska, there is no evidence of the finely divided geographical differences that Burch's analysis would lead one to expect. It is possible that this lack of differentiation is an artifact of a lack of data from that period, however, it would seem that the collections that were made immediately after that time would, to some extent, reflect some differences if they did indeed exist. The available data demonstrate a uniformity of design and construction that extended from Bering Strait to Herschel Island. The common garment design was that described earlier in this chapter–for men, a hip length,

hooded caribou skin parka, and for women, a longer, hooded parka with the curved flaps in front and back. Parkas of both sexes were trimmed with the linear trim of welted light and dark skin, punctuated by regular dots of red yarn, beads or ptarmigan eye patches. Once the whalers sailed through Bering Strait, initiating the substantial Euroamerican contact and accompanying intermixing of cultural influences, parka designs changed. In addition to incorporating Western materials and designs, Iñupiaq seamstresses responded to influences from other Native groups by incorporating new designs into pre-existing traditions.

Parkas have many roles within Iñupiat society. They have an instrumental function of physical protection, a structural role that maintains the gendered division of labor and, in turn, the social structure, and a symbolic role that signals identity and ethnicity. The whole package of making, giving, wearing parkas, with subsistence and kinship ties, is an essential component of being Iñupiat. People wear them not only to communicate individual and Iñupiaq identity but to activate relationships within the Iñupiaq social system and also within broader social and political contexts.

**Choices, Individual Identity and Tradition**

*Whoever has a new idea, makes something new, whether they are from Kobuk, Kaktovik or wherever, everyone else starts making their parkas that way. That's how Eskimo culture is.*

*—Ada Lincoln 1999*

Dress is a direct link to an individual's view of himself and his role in society and culture. For the most part dress is a free individual choice. Each person determines how much or how little he will conform to cultural norms. In addition, each individual adjusts his dress within his chosen framework to reflect even finer-grained aesthetic preferences.

This applies to Iñupiaq parkas. Parka construction decisions operate within a tiered framework or hierarchy. First come gender and function decisions. Who is the parka for, for what occasions will it be worn? If it is for a woman will she use it to carry a baby, will she wear it hunting, or is it for around town? If it is for a man is it for hunting, whaling or town? The pattern is then chosen–conforming with the norm of northern Alaska Iñupiat parkas–or even a wider regional area. Within the norm variations occur–e.g. skirted or straight for women's styles and age group preferences. Younger women have begun wearing parkas that are straight around the hem like men's parkas, instead of the more traditional women's parkas with gathered or pleated skirts[26] (figures 44, 45, 46). Once the type of parka is decided on, the seamstress adjusts the pattern of the garment according to village preferences or her

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Within the overall culturally acceptable framework for parka styles there is room for gender and age-related preferences. While mothers may dress their younger daughters in frilly parkas, they recognize that teenagers have their own opinions about the clothing they wear. Iñupiaq teenagers do chose to wear parkas and are as likely to be seen at a social event in a 'traditional' parka as in jacket with the Chicago Bulls or LA Lakers logo.

Figure 44. Vera Weber wearing a man's style parka.

Figure 45. Teenager wearing a sports team jacket. Ice fishing at Chandler Lake.

Figure 46. An elder in a woman's style parka. Ice fishing at Chandler Lake.

own creative impulses. She may decide to add a variation she saw in another community or to follow a design innovation of her own. Then, within that overall design, come decorative decisions–fabric, ruff, trimmings, color, and complexity of trim. The seamstress may defer to the wearer's preferences in these matters or she may follow her own aesthetic sense.

Choices occur on the level of parka use, too. Once the garment is completed the wearer makes decisions about wearing it. Does he wear it to Fairbanks shopping, to Barrow for *Kivgiq* (the Messenger Feast, a biannual Iñupiaq celebration), out ice fishing, to a basketball tournament, to AFN , to Seattle? Once a straightforward decision based on weather conditions and activity, the context of parka wearing has gained complexity over time. In the current pro-sovereignty and self-determination atmosphere of Alaska, clothing that marks the wearer as Native and Eskimo is worn proudly and purposefully. The garments carry complex meanings. In addition to conveying that the wearer is Eskimo in general and Iñupiaq in particular, Iñupiaq parkas confer authority derived from authenticity and association with the past. Originating as they do in a direct evolutionary path from the indigenous past, contemporary parkas claim the high status of tradition for their wearers.

## Chapter 4: People and Stories

*Fluorescent lights reflect starkly off of the white storage cabinets in the storage space of the Smithsonian (National Museum of Natural History). Rows of cabinets stretch to a vanishing point and the sheer quantity of material overwhelms. I am here to study Iñupiaq Eskimo parkas from northern Alaska. I want to understand how and why the Iñupiat made the garments and how they have changed through the past century.*

*It strikes me, though, as I gaze at a parka stored nearly in a drawer, hood and arms supported by rolls of tissue, that the real story is not here. After beguiling discussions of artifacts as text, reality hits hard. Face to face with a complex artifact in excellent condition, elaborately decorated, and not so far removed from me in time or technique, I realize that there is no text. The parka is essentially mute. It cannot speak of hunting whales at the edge of pack ice in arctic waters, or carrying a baby and picking cranberries or cutting fish and hanging them to dry. It says just a few very simple things about material, trim, size and design. "I'm made of caribou hide, trimmed with wolverine and bits of red yarn, the person who wore me was small and wore a belt. My maker had the leisure (or I was important enough to warrant the time) to sew elaborate trim, creating painstaking designs in trimmed caribou skin." This parka and others from the same time say, through their similar designs and trim, that there was a consensus on beauty and necessity.*

*But it won't sing or dance for me, not like the parkas I know in Alaska, parkas animated by the thoughts and actions of living people. Not like Anaktuvuk Pass in December, following two Eskimo women and their children down a dark snow-blown street, glimpsing rich paisley velveteen trimmed with wolverine under a streetlight, watching the tiny red lights on the heels of the kids' Reeboks flicker through the ground blizzard as they race ahead of their moms. Not like a community fundraiser*

*where elders and teenagers alike follow a strip of numbered tape in a cakewalk, parkas slung back off their shoulders, stepping to a rock music tape. Or a young mother watching from the sidelines, baby sleeping in the back of her flowered parka. Not like hunters in mouton parkas with canvas shells, headed out on their Arctic Cats or Skidoos to catch a caribou. These are the parkas with stories, parkas on the landscape, parkas at work, play, and life. Functional elements of contemporary Iñupiat lives, expressions of who the people are and what is important to them.*

*—Field notes*

**Introduction**

*People will talk about what they are interested in, mostly. They will answer my questions but branch off quickly, finding their own favorite topics, telling stories, revealing their lives. They forget the tape recorder and, for the most part, they forget me, so glad they are to talk and remember.*

*—Field notes*

In this chapter I will introduce some of the people who have shared information about their lives with me for this research. I will place them in context to try to illuminate who they are, how they live, and what they say. I will include some of my musings along the way. This information is presented in a series of fragmentary vignettes, some that have spoken text and some that are just visual impressions but that spoke volumes to me, nonetheless. This chapter, I hope, will humanize this research topic, revealing the people that stand behind the scrim of literature reviews,

databases, and historical research that too often dominate these academic efforts. Talk and action–thinking, doing, remembering. Here I am listener, observer and scribe.

**Stories**

**Lela - Context**

Nome, Alaska, October 1999. I am talking to people about sewing and parkas. Lela Oman has agreed to talk to me. Lela has short wavy grey hair and wears glasses. She is in her 70s and was born in Noorvik, one of 16 children. I find her brownish-red house on the corner of two gravel streets about three blocks from the ocean. The front door opens into a glassed-in porch filled with couches–the whole house is filled with couches. Cinnamon, a miniature golden retriever, guards the door ferociously and Lela holds her back so that I can enter. I step into the living room where more couches adorned with flowered throws and crocheted pillows co-exist with knick-knack laden tables and shelves, a Brother word processing machine and a computer. Lela has written a book of Eskimo tales and is working on another. A large, loudly blaring television occupies the center of the room. Lime green walls the color of Sierra Nevada Pale Ale labels are densely hung with commemorative Iditarod blankets.

Lela shows me the house. Rooms were added on as needed, Alaska-style, and

it has an organic feel with doorways and hallways appearing in unexpected places. She says that it was built for bringing up five kids but now it is just for her. (Her son and her companion Bill live there too.) The kitchen, at the end of a long dark hall, is big and open with an oval table in the center. Mismatched cabinets, some metal--some wood, line up with a portable dishwasher and an upright freezer along two walls. There are lots of freezers–one huge chest freezer in the back store room, the upright in the kitchen, and a smaller chest freezer in the long hall. She shows me the contents of two–they hold fish, moose, lots of blueberries and salmonberries, and jars of seal oil. Her kids don't get seals anymore because butchering them is too much work for her, they say, so everyone gives her seal oil. A clothes-washing machine is in the kitchen too, with the dryer around the corner below the pantry shelves. Lots of bric-a-brac on every surface. Lela points out two bottles with hand painted flowers that were made by her daughter's mother-in-law. Potted plants and ornate floral mugs occupy shelves, and souvenir plates hang on the walls. I see one embossed with an image of Mt. McKinley. Strands of philodendron trail everywhere–in several places Lela has crisscrossed them all of the way across the kitchen ceiling. A large crab shell hangs suspended by a string over the kitchen table.[27]

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In a 1997 interview conducted by Eileen Devinney, Lela's sister Esther said that you can tell the weather by how the shell dips. She has a crab shell hanging in her kitchen, too, and calls it the "Eskimo weather bureau"(personal communication, April 27, 2000).

Lela's cabinet sewing machine sits in the kitchen, a folded circular plastic tablecloth draped over it. In the hall to the living room is an older black Singer with a hand crank. She gave it to her mom in the 1930s. The sewing room is off the hall; it is piled with fabric and furs, a closet full of parkas and a piano with five framed studio portraits her children as young adults. She talks about them, telling me where they live, what they do. Lela reaches into a box and pulls out a grey-black wolf skin that she says that she couldn't pass up because it was such a good buy. She will use the skin to make clothing and craft objects that she sells at fairs. She shows me two wolf ruffs, one edged with beaver, strips of wolverine to sell for trimming, and baggies full of little 'Eskimo faces'. Four velvet and beaver trapper hats, one with beaded wolf-like eyes, complete her current stock of merchandise. (Fred Tocktoo, a park service employee in Nome, told me that all of the men in Nome wears trapper hats–with ball caps underneath.)

We return to the living room to begin the interview, Lela carrying two parkas that she got from the sewing room. Even before we sit down she begins talking about them, telling the history of each, holding it up, then putting it on and posing for photographs. Parkas made by her, by her sister, and by other people follow in quick succession as she moves back and forth between the closet and the living room. Soon the couches are piled with colorful garments and I have entered a world of stories

and memories, populated with the family, friends, events and places that have shaped Lela's life.

**Lela's parkas**

Lela models an elaborate muskrat skin parka with a sunshine ruff (figures 47, 48).

*Esther, my sister, made it. I helped her with it and this was made to order. I won Arctic Native Brotherhood queen, wearing another parkie and I had to have this made to order so I could crown the next queen. And otherwise I would never have worn tassels, I thought they were old fashioned, see? But I just had to have the perfect one so I could crown the next queen, in 1980. This is going on twenty years old. It is made from muskrat flank and belly. Muskrat is in so many different shades and this is belly part and this is flank. The bellies are the light and this is flank and the backs are quite dark and then we use them for another parkie. Muskrat is not big but it is a hardy tough animal and the leather is very tough. Hard to tan but this is homemade, home tanned, everything is homemade.*

The next parka that Lela displays is a anorak style parka that she made herself. It is made from mouton and covered with dark brown poplin. It is trimmed with yellow rickrack. The wolverine fur trim around the hem is punctuated with longer thin strips of skin that dangle below the wolverine.

*...and this is the one I use when I go fishing. This is my fishing parkie. And it is of Tuscany lamb, you've heard of Tuscany lamb from Spain? And that fur is from Tuscany, is Tuscany lamb, it came from Spain, and it is trimmed with beaver and then*

Figure 47. Lela Oman in fur parka.

Figure 48. Detail of trim on Lela's parka.

*wolverine. And then long ago people added little pieces just like that (indicating the small strips of fur that are sewn along the bottom of the hem to hang down below the hem), just like tails hanging down. That makes it thicker and then they always say that anything that's hanging off of your body protects your body. And these are for protection and it is covered with nice durable cloth. I made it, every bit of it. And it is warm...When I go fishing around October for tomcods, I have to have this on because you sit out there a long time, for tomcods to bite. And this my tomcod fishing parkie.*

Lela puts on a parka made of red velveteen that is lined with quilted nylon.

*This is the one that I wear around town a lot, and I need to change the zipper, I will just show it to you. People always say, 'well, go see Lela, go see Lela, she's got all kinds of parkies.' But then when you need them, you need them. And then I do go to church in this too. I can slip that on and off as quickly as I can, you know. We used to see those a lot among older people.*

She talks about learning to sew and about sharing chores with her sister.

*Well, my mother was not a sewer but my dad's relatives were good sewers and, they had to be, and they were from umialiks, the Kobuk Valley umialiks. And they got into furs and they had to rely on their own, like for instance, if you didn't make your own, if you didn't learn to do it on your own, nobody's going to make it for you. My sister learned to do things like that even when she was a little girl. Me, I was always the one that goes out and bring in water, bring in wood, like in the village, like village people do, you know. And I was always the one that was right next to Momma, helping my mother and all that. But Momma saw to it that I learned on my own, too. Even she, even I did not have any pair of mukluks to wear the next day, she knows I'm struggling,*

*struggling, trying to make something for my footwear. She made our cloth parkies, everything was homemade. We never got anything ready-made when I was a little girl. When we started getting ready-made things, I was already past twelve, twelve years old. Everything had to be made, our bloomers, our dresses, our slips, everything.*

Lela says that nearly all of the villages had stores and that her mother got fabric in Selawik, Noorvik and Kobuk.

*My mother had bought a sewing machine with one gold piece and those gold pieces were twenty dollars and she bought her sewing machine (a hand crank Singer) with one gold piece. And my sister had a treadle one later on...and she used to make her own clothes using that treadle one. And we learned to sew and make our own cloth parkas even before we reached age fifteen, yeah, I was already doing things like that when I was sent away to school.*

**Boarding School**

Lela went to White Mountain Industrial School for elementary grades and then was sent to Eklutna for high school. She stayed in high school through tenth grade and then left to work to help her family when her father became blind.

*We wore dresses at school, I was working for teachers and the hospital before I was sent away down there. And my mother saw to it that us girls do things on our own, if she made things for us, we wouldn't learn how to do it. That was the hardest part. Sometimes she would help but some things that she said to me helped me a lot. "If you want to do anything real bad, start on your own, nobody is going to start it for*

*you." and "After you have started doing things on your own, somebody will come along and help you finish." And that came true with my writing and listening to all those stories that we had listened to when we were little, knowing how beautiful they are, that kept me going. I need to share them with somebody...I already knew how to cook before I went to high school and I used to be in the kitchen. We had to work, right there in school. We went to school half a day and the rest of the day was detail work. Our government was not that rich then. Now, people have it pretty nice. They don't have to do extra in order to get their education. But we had to earn our education.*

Lela tells of a trip to Canada for a conference. She compares the educational opportunities that she had in the United States with those of Native people in Canada.

*And when I was in Nova Scotia people would say, "How did you go to school, who sent you to school?" and all that. And I would tell them that we have a good government that was to our advantage. And Canadians did not have that, they just neglected their Natives, and even today, when I used to go to Inuit Conference and I would be sitting with young people from Canada and, specially one talked to me, "How did you get so far ahead? You are even talking about your children going to college." I said, "Yeah, my kids go to college and all that." And she said, "We are so lucky if we go as far as tenth grade." That's what she said. They just neglected their people, so very much.*

Dressing up and going to dances were favorite activities and Lela had dresses for special occasions. She and her friends went to dances at a dance hall in Kotzebue. She had one floor-length atikluk that she wore when she won the Mrs. Nome competition (figure 49).

*I've known and worn gowns, I don't know since when. Since I started going working and dancing. We went dancing every Saturday and we wore gowns. Not even just plain old gown, they were silk gowns. And we got them from traders and we got them from catalogs and we got them from people that wanted to sell them. At one time I even owned seven silk gowns cause we danced a lot! I wore high heels a long time. The funny part of it was, when we were growing up there was a hospital there and the girls, nurses and teachers, wore high heels and to imitate them we used to fit our heels right into the milk cans. Try it some time! Even at camp my sister and I used to stomp on milk cans and walk around on high heels! Those milk cans fit right into your mukluks like that and we just trotted around on milk cans [laughs].*

She tells of her dismay at experiencing racial prejudice in Canada. The comments that disturbed her were precipitated by the clothing that she was wearing.

*And another thing, when I was over in Nova Scotia, Grace and I, were getting ready to go to this banquet and I had gowns. I remember that was a real special banquet and in Halifax, Nova Scotia. And I wore my Hawaiian gown. It was backless and short and everything and I had a nice black cape to wear, and I dressed nice. And I went to the*

Figure 49. Lela Oman showing a 'formal' atikluk.

*bathroom and there were white men, the women were that way (points to one side) and white men that, you know how bathrooms are. And I was standing there waiting for my turn. Two white men came along and they were Canadians. They looked at me up and down, "Where did you get your fineries?" "My, you look beautiful in your fineries, where did you get them from?" I was so stunned I didn't answer them. They were picking me out as a Canadian woman, that's how they treated their Canadian Natives, they intimidated them.*

Lela tells of hunting trips that her family took every the spring, traveling upriver with dogs and sleds. This story illustrates the seasonal subsistence-related traveling that people used to do on a regular basis.

*When we were kids, in the springtime we did a lot of hunting. We had to move into a camp, way up close to Tanana, in those rivers, and come down on rafts. We had to go up there with our sleds and dogs. I was in a big family so we always had two teams and bring along a dory and two kayaks. And then we were coming down on rafts, oh it's scary. It's scary when we are leaving from our camp, way up. And it usually is way back and we're bringing things down to the river. Even in the summertime the dogs are pulling on the tundra and then we get down to where we're going to get on the rafts. I don't know, I was one of these that worried, worried, always looking forward to it. We'd think of it as lots of fun all right but it's still scary. It would be, it is, it was.*

*And anyway there would be my aunt and her husband, they had only one child and they'd have a big raft and our family would have a big raft and my aunt, the oldest of the family, was always with us. And she had a team of her own and we'd have our big tent and her tent and there would be sleds and dogs and when we are getting ready to*

*leave, I'm the one that has to stir the Eskimo ice cream. My aunt's husband, sitting on the box, ok, the sun is way up and my aunt is usually the one that is fixing the ingredients, looking to see what it looked like and coming around and adding this and adding that. And I was stirring, and I was stirring and I was stirring, and when I started getting a little slow, that man that's sitting watching me, "Ayukay", that's my Eskimo name, and I'd get faster. The sun is way up and then the sun would be way down there. I'm still stirring and that's our Eskimo ice cream on that trip, I'm going down. And we are on those rafts two weeks cause that's way back inland.*

After camping and hunting they built rafts out of logs and floated back down to the village, carrying the people, the game, the dogs and the sleds. She was frightened of the raft trips because of the high water in the rivers.

*High water, mountain streams. These mountains that have been just steeped with ice and snow in the wintertime. You know, Fairbanks is like that too in the wintertime. We are on that kind of, oh, every bend you bump right at the bend, you have no control. There's poles and everything and they are pushing everywhere and when you push against that bend the raft turns around and you start going that way again.*

*And I remember, just before we get into those rafts, we line up and we pray. Everybody praying, all of us prayed. And Papa would be the one to go up that big bank to untie the rope. As soon as he untie the rope he is just grabbing it and grabbing it like that and off we go. And we will go miles without landing because the river is too swift. If we try to land there was danger of the logs coming apart, and we always wonder if we are going to reach our village. And then when the, when we get down*

*to where the river is wider the current wasn't that strong anymore. Then there is this west wind, we're bucking the west wind. And sometimes we're out there trying to row, pull that thing.*

*And by the time we get to Selawik it is almost 4th of July and the people are leaving for Kotzebue, those with boats. Papa and Mama always say, it's too cold down in Kotzebue, we're not going down. We hardly ever went down to Kotzebue from Selawik. People went down to hunt, to hunt seals. That's where they got their seal oil, we had to buy our seal oil, traders bought seal oil from the Natives and brought it in the stores to sell. And that was hard living, real hard living. I often wondered how we made it.*

**Elizabeth**

Elizabeth lives in a trailer house on the east edge of Fairbanks. She stores an assortment of furs, skins and baleen in the entryway of her trailer. They came from her visits home to Kaktovik. As she invites me in, she notes that she will have to put them away before summer because they would be eaten by little animals. She will store them in her freezer.

Her living room is lined with photographs of family, children, grandchildren and parents. In addition to a sofa, chair and bed, the furnishings include a television and a well-stoked wood stove. Elizabeth is a proficient seamstress and many of her ongoing projects are scattered about the room. She is currently making Eskimo yoyos

and thimbles which will be sold in a gift shop in town. One of the points she emphasizes during our visit is that she does not waste any materials. All of the scraps of skin and fur are made into small objects.

**Elizabeth's Story**

Elizabeth Frantz was born on Barter Island in Kaktovik in 1929. She lived on the island until she was twenty-three years old. Her family hunted, fished, and trapped for their food, for clothing material, and to provide furs for trading.

*The island, in the summertime it is nice because we stay away from the mosquitos. That's the main thing. The mosquitos inland, you can't stand them, there are so many. We are so lucky we live in the island so there are less mosquitos to fight. If we go hunt there are so many that we can't even hardly...I mean we have those nets...if you just go like this they just eat you up just because we didn't have anything to take care of them at that time, no spray nothing. We try to take care of ourselves, build a fire when we are eating, build a fire so we could smoke it all up.*

*We lived in Kaktovik until I was twenty-three. Since I was twenty-three I left. In the mountains we had hunting ground, in the springtime we'd go hunt. Go ice fishing, trapping, there's a lot of stuff that you could do every day. Specially squirrels, coming up, different food to hunt. We trapped the squirrels with snares. We had a lot of stuff, we start hunting, they come out in first of April, in the mountains, in the villages they don't come til May, at the ocean I mean, where we live. And we have to go down then cause the rivers are going up, you know. If we stay we get stuck up there. The*

*Hulahula, Jago river, you know they come up in the middle of April. So we have to get out of the mountains and go down.*

*We get seals, we live on seals. Without seal our dogs would never survive. The seal, we get in summer, put in cellars, eat in winter. Fishing all summer, with nets and boats. So we hunt every day, we can do fish netting til the fall, and ice comes...Remember we used to just paddle...no evinrudes. Go down the island and check our net two times a day in the morning and in the evening. That's our job, we have to put them in the cellar, freeze them for winter, see. Whitefish, kaktak, specially we had big kaktak up there, bigger than anybody else.*

Elizabeth's father was an important leader in the village and a Presbyterian minister. He got people together for a few minutes each night to teach them to read the Bible. He helped people; if someone died on the North Slope he would go, traveling by dog team. In the summer he took his family to Barrow to trade furs for sugar, flour, rice and oatmeal. They traveled in a big boat that had a wood stove in it.

*I mean we don't sit around. We do everything every day. Like me and my brother haul ice and wood for tomorrow. Ice for water, thawed on the wood stove. Wood from driftwood. When I was a young girl I thought,"Where does the wood come from, you know, is that coming through the ocean?" And my dad used to go in the kayak and rope it and then we used to haul it up and I used to think, "Where in the world did the wood come from? Oh maybe God sent it like my dad say...oh maybe God sent it to my dad." And I find out when I move to Fairbanks watching the river, "Oh yes, that's where that driftwood comes from, washing down from the river, oh yea, Dad! God*

*sent everything to us to the island like my dad said...oh yea, Dad. I know now how that wood comes."*

Elizabeth learned to sew by watching her mother.

*I learned myself, I watched my mom making our clothes and my mukluks, and everything. Clothes for hunting in the wintertime, in springtime we did different mukluks for us, waterproof-like. Ever since I watched my mom, I watched her, helped her, learned from her. We didn't get any mouton, we didn't get any sheepskin. We have sheep, mountain sheep, and caribou. That's all we have for clothing, especially caribou, because we don't have a store to go get a fur, we hunt our own.*

*I guess when I was a teenager I only had two or three dresses, and I don't remember that I had lots. My mother used to, I remember, when I was getting bigger, my mom added some more stuff to make it more long. That time we didn't wear pants, we wear these, you know, the old clothing, caribou pants and the dress over, and parka and mukluks.*

*Three younger brothers and I, when my mom was going to have a baby, we have to stay out. We can't come back until the baby's born. That was long time sometimes. We'd play around out there making little something, little snowhouses, play with the dogs.*

*That time before I was born I don't know what they had, but when I was born they started having stuff coming, you know, like mail and orders from Sears Roebuck. And it was lucky we started having that but the older people, you know, ahead of us, I don't*

*know how they did it, when you have to think every day what you are going to have tomorrow. The DEW (Distant Early Warning) line just started coming when I was leaving. When they started having nice stuff I left.*

*It's so tiring sometimes when you have fish, fish, to eat, fish, and you get caribou and sheep and seal meat. I ate so much seal when I was younger now I am allergic to it. I can't eat it anymore. I get hives. I don't know how it is fighting me. Seal oil doesn't bother me, but the meat.*

Elizabeth's mother died in 1951 and her father died in an accident while seal hunting. He slipped on the ice, the gun hit the ice and went off, killing him. Elizabeth married a White man who worked on the DEW line in Kaktovik. They began a family and he decided that the village did not offer enough so they moved to Fairbanks. All of their children were born in Fairbanks except the youngest son. He was born in Barrow during a seven year stint of living there and running a store. Her husband died of a heart attack at the age of fifty-six. They had six children, four boys and two girls. Elizabeth does not really feel she moved away from Barter Island, Kaktovik is still very much her home.

*I didn't move away...I live there all the time. I go home all of the time, two trips a year. The only thing the old people said to me one time, "At least you the one always come back, you never forget your hometown. The others they just disappear, they never bother to come back, you always come hunt with us, visit and make us happy."*

**Grocery Store - Nome** *(Field notes)*

I notice an older Iñupiaq woman in the grocery store–hesitating over the cheese. Someone helps her find what she wants and she joins her daughter at the checkout. She is wearing a blue and lavender parka–densely floral fabric, big wolverine ruff–with a simple band of orange embroidered tape above the skirt. She has big thick glasses and a deep royal blue scarf on her head, tied under her chin. She has to search in her purse for something at the checkout so she sits down on the linoleum floor by the checkout counter to rummage in her purse. It is a classically Iñupiaq action taken by one who was used to living without chairs and was used to sitting on the floor or ground as a matter of course.

**Pearl's Cabin** *(Field notes)*

Pearl Sedacca invites me to go with her to close up her mom's cabin for the winter. It is late September and cold weather is obviously on the way. We set out for the cabin at Big Hurrah at about 6:30pm. We first stop at her friends' to borrow a rifle–it turns out to be an AK47 semi-automatic. Pearl bundles it in a fleece jacket and sticks it behind the seat in the pickup. There have been bears seen out along the coast–brown bears. We head east on a road paralleling the ocean, big white-capped waves are breaking in bands along the shore. Wind. Some intermittent rain. Lots of cabins/fish camps every which way along the coast. I see four-wheelers, plywood

shacks, a couple of teepees, and one wood-sided round water storage tank that was recycled into a cabin. The ground around is strewn with sleds, fish-drying racks, and barrels. Safety Sound appears on our left with the ocean still on our right. Geese and gulls are on the sound. After 25 or so miles we turned inland, heading up to Solomon (town of three plus some dogs). Solomon got a lot of money recently to fix up its cemetery. We can see the shining white crosses and grave fences as we drive by. They are definitely the only newly painted anything in Solomon–mostly a grey weathered ghost town. We drive on up the startlingly clear river, lined with gold willow and russet tundra.

We arrive at Pearl's mom's cabin, a little 10x12' plywood sided building with a front deck and a little entryway. To secure it for the season we needed to cover the windows and the top of the stovepipe. We haven't brought any materials with us so we search around the cabin for boards and nails. We find a bucket to put over the stovepipe then look for something to tie it down with so the wind cannot blow it off. Pearl finds a dangling piece of electrical wire inside the cabin and breaks off a piece. She climbs up onto the roof and, using a long stick, lowers the bucket upside down onto the stovepipe, tying the wire tightly so it should stay put. More wind and rain, cold rain. We search around the cabin for big squares of plywood to cover the windows, finding one, but we need three. Then we find some galvanized nails and

hammered the board up. We finally find some narrow planks of wood to piece together to cover the other windows. More wind, rain, dripping off of the cabin.

Inside the cabin is a wood stove, propane stove, kerosene lamp, Coleman lantern, two twin beds arranged in an L shape and a small table. There are lots of dishes in a drying rack, and matches, pans, and books. Part of an old weathervane stands in the corner and two porcelain painted, lace collared drama masks hang over a window. Hanging from the ceiling are three white netting covers made for keeping bugs off of food. Pearl says that she never remembered to use them when they were in the package so she hung them from the ceiling. It is a festive touch. She dumps out the water that was left in buckets by the stove, we blow out the lamp that we had lighted earlier with no real hope of warmth, and we head back to town.

A blond-colored bear noses along the creek, wandering in and out of the willows, bear-like. A fox crosses the Solomon River bridge ahead of us. Pearl shows me where she and her mom pick berries–an easy access place because her mom can't walk far any more. She shows me where they tent camped every summer when she was young–along Safety Sound. She says that they never went to town in the summer. They fished, hunted, beachcomber, and picked berries. She loves going out in the country.

Pearl has deep roots in the country and Iñupiaq culture but she is also thoroughly modern. She has strong opinions about many issues including what it

means to be Native, the importance of subsistence and the role of women. She is gentle and respectful of her mother and her uncle, both of whom are in their 80s (figure 50).

**Pearl on women's work**

*The family provides the weapons and the men get to go hunting. The women have to clean the catch and cook it–that's the hard work. Women not only have to work* [for wages]*, but they have to help with subsistence and keep a job and raise their kids. They come home from work and they have a dead seal on the floor.*

**Pearl on tradition**

*They* [Iñupiat] *don't do it out of tradition, they do it cause they love it. They love being out there, they have a taste for that kind of food. They won't savor it unless they go get it themselves–you've got to be out there. Like my mom wants tomcod now, she has it in her freezer but she wants fresh. The State has done more to screw up what they real priorities are–I'd like to strike 'subsistence' from the vocabulary. I'd like to use 'sustenance'–it's even stronger than that–it goes beyond. In western culture people worry about their own families, not the community, not all of Savoonga and Gamble.*

**Pearl on walrus quotas**

*It's tough. You can only get four walrus. How does a guy do that? How does a man feed his family and maybe five others that are depending on him for food? They are just trying to make us live on dead chickens, that's what they are trying to do!*

Figure 50. Pearl Sedacca and Frances Johnson.

**Anaktuvuk Pass** *(Field notes)*

Late August is the perfect time for Anaktuvuk Pass–the tundra is burnished gold, red, maroon, orange and green. New snow has come to stay on the peaks. No mosquitos, no wind. Fog in the morning then clear sky with scraps of cloud caught among the mountains and lingering in the high valleys. I walk out the lake and cemetery road, immersed in fall colors and crisp air. I pass Ada Lincoln going the opposite direction in her little turquoise Suzuki car. She waves and grins, her head just peeking out from behind the steering wheel. She is on her way to bingo at the community center. Later I stop by to say hello and find fifteen people playing, with more trickling in. Men and women sit at long folding tables, their bingo sheets spread out in front of them. Each wields a neon-colored marker with a broad round tip. As the numbers are called out by a bored-looking teenager at the front, the players daub their markers on their sheets, covering the numbers with irregular circles of bright pink, magenta, and chartreuse ink.

Ada sits by Ruth Rulland–Ada in her velveteen winter parka and Ruth in a brightly colored floral atikluk. These are women who remember the settlement of Anaktuvuk Pass, who lived a nomadic life when they were young. Ada told me about times when they truly had almost nothing to eat. They browned flour in a skillet, mixed it with water and ate it. She remembers seeing zippers for the first time. Now she lives in a house with plumbing, a television, telephone, refrigerator, and stove.

She has an electric sewing machine and she drives around the village (the two miles of roads) in an automobile that was brought to the village in a cargo plane.

**Thinking about tradition** *(Field notes)*

People just do what they do, they generally do not think about whether what they are doing is 'traditional' or not. Especially in everyday life. At celebrations or festivals there is more awareness of 'tradition' and even re-enacting past activities and dress. But in daily life in Anaktuvuk Pass, for example, Rachael Riley is not thinking that going caribou hunting after school is a 'traditional activity'. She is going because that is what she does, that is her life, that is what is right. And she does it in the best way, most efficient way, she can–with an Argo (a six wheeled, motorized all-terrain vehicle) and rifle. It is the act of going to catch a caribou that is important, not the tools that she uses. People do not go out and camp and hunt because it is traditional, or to maintain tradition. They go because it is an integral part of who they are, both individually and as a group. The clothing and sewing is the same. They do not wear atikluks to say who they are, they wear them because of who they are. Iñupiat wear those kinds of parkas and atikluks. We can read it as a statement but they do not think of it as a message. These unacknowledged and unintentional patterns of daily life *are* tradition, in the sense that anthropologists understand it. Not only is it changeable and contingent but it is virtually an unconscious continuum of people's

unexamined practices. That is not to say that people do not make conscious statements of 'tradition' as well. Celebrations, ceremonies such as weddings, and competitions are all venues where 'tradition' is consciously presented. These are times where key cultural elements are often employed in a symbolic manner to represent the continuation of 'tradition'. Clothing, in particular, is nearly always displayed as an emblem of tradition, and there are lavish displays of beautiful fur parkas, kamiks, and mittens at these events. Most of these garments, particularly the parkas, are not worn at all in everyday life, but are made especially for these types of occasions.

I don't think that Vera makes parkas for the girls herself or anyone else because they are 'traditional'. She makes them because they are an integral part of Iñupiaq cultural practice–so much so that their making and wearing are not perceived by Iñupiaq people as being 'special'. Other practices enjoy the same status–hunting is a big one. Iñupiat do not hunt because it is a traditional thing to do, they hunt because it is part of who they are and they would not be themselves in the same way if they did not hunt, fish, gather berries. The tools are not important, the doing is. We, Euroamerican culture/government came in and on the one hand said, "You must be civilized, go to school, wear 'normal' clothing, eat 'normal' food..." We introduced and imposed housing, tools, weapons, food, values, language, clothing,

wage labor, and religion. And we enforced compliance with these non-Native standards. Now, having inflicted all of that on the Iñupiat, we mourn the demise of the 'noble savage' and chastize them for losing their traditional culture and for using modern tools weapons, snowmachines, ATVs and clothing in pursuing their traditional activities. All along, the Iñupiaq people have apparently conformed. But much of the conformity is on the surface, or in aspects of life that do not jeopardize their identification of themselves. When key elements of the culture are threatened, as in the case of the IWC ban on whaling or the threat of losing their land due to the discovery of oil, Iñupiaq people reassert themselves, using whatever means were necessary to maintain their cultural values. Since mainstream America has become more sensitive to racial inequities in general and its treatment of Native Americans in specific, an attitude that accepts and even fosters 'Nativeness' has become prevalent in the past thirty years. In embracing Native America, we have constructed a romanticized notion of Native Americans that is rooted in our own image of our 'frontier' days. We value the 'good old days' (that never were as we imagine) and regret their passing. In the same vein we value the 'traditional' times of Native Americans, thus raising former practices and 'old' objects to iconic status. Contemporary Native Americans are taking advantage of this privileging of tradition and are reinstating or inventing 'traditional' practices to make legal and moral claims.

**Job**

I picked Mr. Kokuchurok up at his house. He gives me directions and says he will be waiting outside. I tell him that I can come and knock on his door but he says, "No, if someone has a car and is going to give you a ride, you should be waiting for them so they don't waste their gas." Sure enough, he is outside sitting on his steps when I pulled up. His house is tucked away behind the armory. An old green van with no engine and one of his neighbor's boats are parked right by his front steps. His house is number 664–no street name that I can tell. He wears jeans, grey turtleneck, a navy blue and white plaid shirt and ankle-high leather boots that zipped. In his shirt pocket is a small, thick notebook and a couple of pens–the notebook looked well used. He has certain things to tell me and he starts right in. He talks easily the entire 90 minutes of the tape with no prompting. I interject a question or two and he answers but moves right back to his own agenda (figure 51).

On the way home he tells me that he is the garbage picker for his route from his house to the post office and to the XYZ Senior Center. He cleans it up every day and yet ever day there is new trash along the way. This is an uncommon activity in an Alaskan village where most people are apparently oblivious to trash. Mr. Kokochurok is remarkable. Intelligent, thoughtful and completely lucid about his life, his culture and the difficulties that western culture has created for Native Alaskans.

Figure 51. Job Kokochurok.

*So we don't waste time atall then, the first thing my dad told me, there's a man above me, all my life, gonna look at me. When I first start to, going to walk with him, soon as I was able to leave my mother, he'd let me follow him somewhere. That's the way his forefathers believed. They don't believe just by talking to you is the way you going to do it and leave at that. If you just teach em just by talking, they'll be lazy to do it. So even if a child is lazy, if he do it, he will want to do it later on, it will become a joy to him. That's the teaching from my dad.*

*Now for hunting, what Eskimos believe in, if you ever want to have money or job or be able to get animals. This is how you got to live. You can't touch woman around their private parts. Don't ever touch them around. Animal know a man that touches a woman around, even they don't want to get married to them, they just want to please themselves. That kind of man, when they see a animal, they run away right away. Or he can be sneaking up to animal and, just when he gonna shoot, he would get into the willows, and when he come home he would say, "I saw what I was gonna shoot but he just disappeared, I almost got him." That's the man that touched the woman around. Animals are scared of them. If he seal hunt, seal will go right down, they know, they know. They look like they didn't go college or high school, those seals, but they can see. That's the belief of Eskimos. This come from heathens, now. The white people are educated, they're not heathens at all. They know lot more than, I mean, the way they think they know a lot more. But that's the way we're told. I listen to lot of men hunting and so forth. I never tell them the cause. It's a shame, to warn them, they will think that I make fun of them. I just leave them, just like I don't know. If you aim to marry them [women], it won't spoil your hunting. Because you're going to have them. It's the ones that just play around, they play around a lot right now, high school ones, because they learn better than Eskimo way.*

Job tells of having to quit school to work and hunt after his father died.

*And me, I was want to keep going to school and my mother told me, "Go hunt, Job, we can't live without you working, even wintertime." So I had to stop because my dad died like this. All my sisters were sitting, my mother, my dad right there. My dad always had me by him. Lotta times I feel sorry for boys that have no dad. It makes me want me to cry, what they're missing. How wicked a man is to leave the wife that got his children. He's not fit to live on top of this earth. If he doesn't have no love for children, especially a boy. I enjoy my dad so much, because I always by him. He teach me always that a man got to support the family, he teach me that already. Because I'm the wood and water keeper wherever we go. The rest of my sisters are free to do other things, sewing or cooking or something but my job is wood and water. That's my duty. That's a men's job. So while he is sitting, he look at me, like this, you know I was right there. While he is looking at me he talk. "Jesus is the only way." And he fall right to me.*

*I take it for right there, my duty now it to support my mother and all my sisters, my responsibility, when he fall down toward me. Because he already teach me, my dad. I know he love me, he take me lot of place. Oh I was hurt quite a bit in my heart. Lot of times when I see fatherless boys, boy I pity them. They're missing out on a lot of joy with your dad, lot of things you would have learned, lot of important things. Very important things I learned from my dad. What he tell me to pass on to my offspring. He said,"These are from my grandpa from way back, now you got to pass them on to your remaining." Too bad that's how come today young people are haywire. Educated people are raising them, not the heathens. So I'm glad we were in Cape Darby, even [though] I want to go to school very much. My dad's teaching when I grow up let me progress better than those that have already gone to school. They don't know how to*

*support their sisters, mother, even today, because they're not taught. They miss out on so good of instructions.*

**Discussion**

Now, considering tradition again. If we broaden our view from the narrow focus of individual experience and move back to gain a broader perspective, we see changes in practices from generation to generation. But we also see the connections between generations. Job and his sister Frances, Pearl's mother, grew up at White Mountain where their family lived on the food they hunted and money from trapping. Pearl, as a child, lived in Nome but moved with her mother and siblings out to camp on Safety Sound in the summer to fish and hunt. Pearl's own adult experience is fishing, hunting and berry picking at the cabin up the Big Hurrah River where she goes on weekends during the summer. Taken together, these stories might be seen to represent a progressive change over time in people's subsistence activities, proximity to town, and length of time spent out on the land. This could be assumed to illustrate a diminishment of 'tradition'. In actuality, however, to the participants in the stories it is not a diminution at all but is a continuation of long-standing practice—practice that has transformed itself in the face of changing necessities such as the economic need to work, to be near town for schools, and even different perceptions of what constitutes a satisfactory camping/subsistence experience. Admittedly the connections between these vignettes that I have strung together may

appear to be somewhat tenuous. They are all connected though, by family relationships, common culture and geographic setting. I believe that, examined in this manner, they offer a means of understanding how change can be assessed and how people's concepts of what is 'traditional' takes shape and is transmitted—to themselves, to their children, and to the rest of the world.

A practice is never exactly replicated from one time to the next; real life always changes unless it is purposefully preserved in some form of living history presentation. It is fascinating is to note how things change, what the catalysts for change are, and how people adjust their lives and their viewpoints, maintaining their sense of continuity and tradition as they do. People are very clear about what constitutes tradition in their lives. It is only when their practices are viewed from outside and an external definition of tradition, a freeze-frame, in effect, is applied that there is an apparent discontinuity.

## Chapter 5: Meaning

*What people make is likely to be as important as what they say in demonstrating their relationship to their environment.*

*—Field notes*

### Introduction

Material objects are purposefully constructed and used by people to negotiate their way through life. They reveal human intention as well as historical and cultural influences that operate at levels independent of individual consciousness. Relationships within and among human groups, and the relationship between human groups and the world are revealed through the objects that people make. Clothing, selected by the individual and expressing individual identity and group affiliation, is one of the most revealing categories of material culture because of its visibility and its proximity to the body.

People choose their clothing within a framework of societal norms and individual desires that originate from a particular combination of historical circumstance, cultural tradition, contemporary fashion, and individual need. Clothing indicates identity, status, and ethnicity on both societal and individual levels. Societal clothing practices, viewed diachronically, illuminate processes of cultural change and reveal the direction and strength of factors that effected change. Individual clothing choices disclose an individual's perception of his or her place in their family and community. What a person wears, chosen in a complex interaction of individual

desires and cultural norms, reflects his perception of his role in society and his conformity or non-conformity to cultural norms indicates his acceptance or rejection of that role.

In the face of increasing globalization with the attendant availability of information about and access to diverse products, clothing today even more directly indicates people's perception of, and acquiescence to, their roles in society. It also gives them the opportunity to accept or reject those roles and a means of changing at least the visible evidence of them. Able to chose from stores and mail order catalogs and to shop on-line, people.in northern Alaska have access to the world and may select from an infinite array of clothing options. Iñupiat can choose either 'traditional' or contemporary garments, or, as is often the case, a combination of the two. Their choice depends on a combination of context and personal preference. What was perhaps a more straightforward decision based on environmental constraints and group identity before contact has become progressively more complicated. Contact, with its imposition of Western values and accompanying access to Western materials, added new dimensions to dress in northern Alaska, providing alternative clothing styles, new materials and rules for what was presentable. Changes in lifestyle wrought by introduced economic opportunities and shifts in settlement patterns created new social roles. Cultural mixing brought on by the increased mobility of the whaling era distributed design ideas across the north. Siberian trim designs migrated to western

Alaska; Alaskan parka designs were adopted by Westerners and the Mackenzie Eskimo people in Canada. Since the 1960s, resource exploitation, politics and the social climate of the United States have been important influences on clothing trends, along with a changing climate of opinion for Native Americans in general. Currently, claims of 'Native' and 'traditional' are becoming powerful currency within the state and Native garments are worn to emphasize people's connection with an authentic indigenous past. While adjustments have been made in response to these external forces, a strong thread of cultural resilience continues to run through Iñupiaq clothing practices. That thread is the continuing importance of clothing in expressing and sustaining the core values of Iñupiaq culture.

The relationship between humans, animals and environment that shaped prehistoric Iñupiaq culture remains important to Iñupiaq people today, underlying and sustaining contemporary subsistence practices. In addition to providing essential nutrition, the relationship shapes Iñupiaq identity, sustains Iñupiaq spirituality and maintains the social structure of Iñupiaq communities through the interrelationships engendered by the cooperation and sharing . People's actions are purposeful (Strathern 1988) and Iñupiat people would not continue to hunt today if they were not benefitting from it. In contemporary times there are other means of getting food and many people have jobs that support the purchase of food or have access to government assistance programs.

The same goes for sewing—clothing is available through stores and mail order and people do not have to make their own clothes to meet their physical needs. Both sewing and hunting[28], however, are components of the all encompassing subsistence system that structures Iñupiaq life. Although the continuation of these activities is not as driven by physical need as it was in the past, subsistence practices continue because they make life work for Iñupiat people. People acquire a sense of belonging and cultural continuity from participating. And, not inconsequentially, people enjoy the activities and associated social interactions. When Vera's uncle asked her to sew a parka for him, for example, it made an important connection for her. It acknowledged the quality of her work and the importance of her role within the extended family.

Parkas–the garments and related practices–are multi-valent and multi-functional within Iñupiaq culture but the elemental meaning that underlies all others and, in fact, gives the others their efficacy is this connection with subsistence. The relationships that are implicated within the subsistence system structure Iñupiaq society and constitute an interlocking system of sharing, obligation, and reciprocity—among kin, among hunting partners, and between each kin group and the community as a whole. Parkas are a medium of reciprocity that maintains social relationships. Sewing, and the relationships involved, is an essential manifestation of

[28]Here I use hunting broadly to include all hunting, fishing and gathering activities.

the female role within the system, maintaining the gendered balance of labor. In addition to this fundamental relationship, clothing acts in other capacities, including marking identity and claiming tradition.

**Identity**

That clothing expresses ethnicity is so obvious that it might appear to be a trivial statement. Additionally, one could easily assume that ethnic expressions via clothing are superficial or easily set aside because clothing is readily taken off or put on. This would be a mistake, however. Through its very changeability clothing exemplifies inherent flexibility in meaning and is therefore particularly useful in ethnic expression. Iñupiaq Eskimo clothing, while symbolizing Iñupiaq identity, Eskimo identity and Alaskan identity, is more than a symbol. It embodies as well as symbolizes Iñupiaq identity, in that it actively constructs and maintains Iñupiaq identity and ethnicity through the processes of making, giving and wearing clothing. Because of its underlying structural relationship to the subsistence system, clothing is used by Iñupiaq people to negotiate identity in contemporary contexts. Iñupiaq clothing asserts claims of authenticity and tradition in political situations, acquiring power for its wearers and their culture. It negotiates gender (both in the wearing and the making), acknowledging and reinforcing the importance of the woman's role

within the social structure, and it constantly reminds the Iñupiat who they are, both displaying and embodying the values that personify Iñupiaq culture.

The symbolic role of clothing in expressing Iñupiaq identity is perhaps the most obvious of its contemporary roles. As Barth (1969), Geertz (1973) and Spicer (1980) point out, group boundaries are maintained through symbols that often originate in existing cultural forms. An association of the symbols with tradition, whether invented or actual, authenticates them, reinforcing the group's claims. Iñupiaq parkas and kamiks, with their undisputed origins in the indigenous past and their distinctive appearance, are particularly useful symbols of Iñupiaq identity. They are so useful, in fact, that they have been adopted by other groups and have acquired a broad range of meaning independent of Iñupiaq society.

Present day Iñupiaq parkas express and embody identity on several levels, some of which operate outside of the boundaries of Iñupiaq culture. As a regional icon, parkas symbolize the north and are a metaphor for the climate itself or for the residents of the region. Figure 52 is a photograph taken in Hermasillo, Mexico of the image of a parka-clad Eskimo that is an advertising logo for an ice company. Here the meaning is simple–the parka equals cold. The relationship between Eskimoes and cold is also illustrated in Australia where an ice chest or cooler is referred to as an 'Eskie' (Devinney, pers. com. 2001). These examples demonstrate what is perhaps


Figure 52. Advertisement for an ice company on a truck in Hermasillo, Mexico.

the most general message of parka symbolism–a message based on geographic characteristics.

On a more fine grained scale, parkas have come to stand for the rugged, self-reliant abilities that are assumed to adhere to all people who make their homes in the arctic and subarctic. Parkas elicit images of explorers, scientists, traders and trappers–people with the fortitude, skill and drive to travel and work in some of the most inhospitable regions of the earth. These garments, provided to non-Natives by Inuit peoples across the north, do more than give the non-Native environmentally functional clothing–they endow non-Natives with the character and abilities that are assumed to be innate to Inuit people. Arctic explorers gaze stalwartly out of historic photographs, looking hardy, brave and more than a bit exotic in their fur parkas and kamiks. Not only have they acquired the skill of the Eskimo but they have gained some of their 'other'-ness as well (figure53).

Even more finely grained and local is the message intended by Figure 54, a poster advertising a Native Alaskan radio show on a local station. Here the image of an Eskimo wearing an old style parka was chosen to convey a generic Alaska Native identity. It is interesting that the poster designer chose to use the woman's style parka, perhaps because it was more distinctive in design and obviously conveys a connection with tradition in addition to its more obvious message.

Figure 53. Non-Natives in Inupiaq parkas.

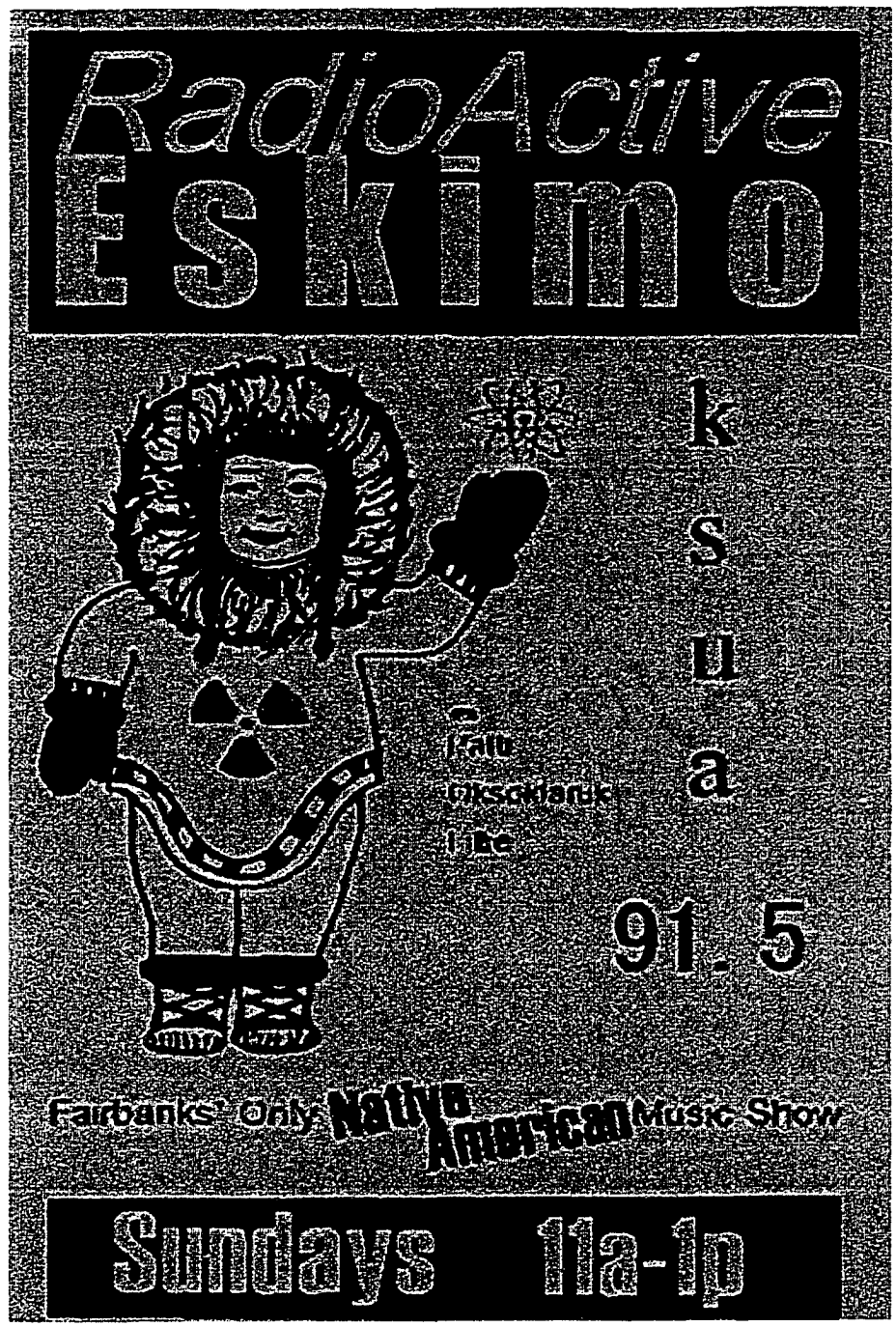


Figure 54. Native American radio show poster.
University of Alaska Fairbanks campus.

It would be wrong to assume that because a particular symbol has been adopted into common usage with a commonly accepted meaning that its meaning is the same for each group that uses it. As Cohen (1987) notes in his work in Britain, material objects or behaviors of groups or individuals may appear to be the same and yet may have different meanings that are rooted in their particular experience. Communication and international consumerism have created a facade of universal culture that obscures local identities but individual groups maintain their cultural individuality through a variety of strategies. Strathern observes what she terms 'global spread and local fractioning', saying: "...an increasing homogenisation of social and cultural forms seems to be accompanied by a proliferation of claims to specific authenticities and identities" (1995:3). Clothing offers an expedient means of claiming specific and yet diverse identities as is demonstrated by the variety of identity-symbolizing contexts illustrated here.

**Gender**

Within the Iñupiaq social system, women had, and continue to have, a critical role as cultural ambassadors and negotiators. As Jackson (1994) notes in her study of women and clothing in archaeological contexts, women were consumers of goods and manufacturers of goods. They constructed items for both male and female use out of indigenous raw materials and out of raw material acquired in trade. Women

mediated between cultures, creating useable wholes out of materials from both; combining and adapting components of an indigenous culture with components of an introduced culture that was not suited to the environment or culture. In Levi-Straussian (1966) terms, Iñupiaq women were the *bricoleurs* of northern Alaska as they constructed cloth garments for their own families as well as fur garments for Euroamericans. As arbiters of culture through clothing, women maintained and enhanced their already powerful cultural role. Previously adept at mediating human-animal relationships, they easily took on the Iñupiaq-Western relationship, finding a middle-ground between the Euroamerican insistence that the Iñupiat change and the Iñupiat need to retain ownership of their own identity and culture. From an anthropological perspective I argue that the calico covered fur parka is the ultimate symbol of accommodation and resistance in the north–the introduced calico cover concealing but not supplanting the indigenous furs underneath. Women, the creators of these garments, determined the degree and direction of adaptation to assimilative pressures–adopting some new materials and designs, retaining some old and negotiating innovative combinations as necessary.

**Tradition**

Many cultural conventions or traditions are internalized at the subliminal level; individuals accrue them as they are raised within a particular culture. Some

traditions are more overt; they are both more consciously assumed and more tangible. These traditions 'stand for', visually and actively, other more subtle, less easily expressed and conveyed aspects of culture. These visible symbols of culture and embodiments of tradition function not only within the soul of the people, they function as external markers or emblems that members of the cultural group use for political ends. Clothing is one such visible symbol of 'tradition' for Iñupiaq people. Thus an Iñupiaq skin parka worn in a parka competition, is not only an example of outstanding individual craftsmanship, it is a discernible statement of Iñupiat tradition. It claims authority for its makers and wearers by connecting them with their ancestral past. It is a visual testimony to the long standing Iñupiaq claims to the land and to an undeniably authentic indigenous past that pre-dates that of Euroamericans on this continent.

Problem arise with imprecise popular use of the term tradition. An object is labeled 'traditional' if it has attributes that are perceived to be 'old'. An activity is 'traditional' if it has been carried out the same way over a long period of time (long is undefined). Difficulties ensue when the term is used to convey a more rigorous meaning in social science or in implementing public policy. The imprecise usage obscures the more real-life meaning and leads to misunderstanding. In a more critically defined social science sense, based on the adaptable way that people actually lead their lives, an action is 'traditional' if it fulfills a continuing purpose or

function within the social structure of the group. That purpose may be practical, it may be symbolic or, more likely, it may be both. Thus a 'traditional' practice is simultaneously contemporary in that it operated in the past and it operates in the present to fulfill the same function within the group.

An example of the kinds of problems arising from different understandings of 'traditional' is seen in the continuation of northern Alaskan Iñupiat subsistence practices. The past few decades have seen increasing pressure on fish and game within the state, causing competition between user groups. Although ANILCA provides for a subsistence priority for rural subsistence users, stating, "...the term 'subsistence uses' means the customary and traditional uses by rural Alaska residents of wild, renewable resources for direct personal or family consumption..."(U.S. Congress 1980), land managers, state officials and non-Native sportsmen have objected to that priority by rural, and most often Native, users. They often justify their objection asserting that because contemporary subsistence practice includes modern transportation and weapons, its practitioners are not entitled to claim a priority. In the eyes of many non-Natives, use of modern technology de-legitimizes the Native claim to resources. Here we see in action the confusion between symbolic and pragmatic behavior that comes about as a result of the dominance of western technology and culture (Cohen 1987). With the function-centered definition of tradition, however, there is no conflict between using ATVs or rifles or snowmachines

for hunting and still claiming that the hunting is 'traditional'. It is the act of hunting, bringing home meat, sharing that meat with kin and community, that is traditional and integral to the continuation of the Iñupiat way of life. It is a means to an end, and it is the end result–sustaining the sociocultural system–that is what is important, not the means. Sewing plays a similar role in Iñupiaq culture, maintaining the traditional relationships among man, woman and animals and providing an avenue for extending reciprocal relationships to other members of the extended family. Sewing is a creative outlet for creativity that produces objects that are actively used and appreciated on a daily basis. Clothing expresses some of the most conservative values of Iñupiaq culture while at the same time providing its makers with a vehicle for innovative use of new materials and technology.

**Conclusion**

So, in the final analysis, what do we see in considering Iñupiaq clothing practices? We see practices that are firmly embedded within cultural and historical contexts but that are responsive to contemporary needs. These practices produce garments that are capable of multiple layers of signification, symbolizing individually and locally specific identities as well as generic group and regional identities. We also see an example of the malleable nature of tradition—how it is shaped to suit the needs of the present while maintaining its links with the past. Iñupiaq clothing is one

of the most visible ways that contemporary Iñupiaq express their connection to the past, a connection whose significance is illustrated in more subtle ways by the veneration of elders and the continuing importance of other subsistence practices. Clothing's flexibility allows duel referencing; seamstresses can respond to new ideas and materials in creative ways while retaining the traditional cultural meaning of the garments. Women make and remake parkas, creating new covers but keeping the lining and fur trim and ruff. This practice can be seen as a metaphor for the adaptability of tradition; people are able to retain their cultural values and at the same time adjust to contemporary needs and/or opportunities.

Boultwood and Jerrard (2000) argue that imitation relates to behavior whereas identification relates to the adoption of values, beliefs and attitudes in addition to behavior. In the case of Iñupiaq clothing practices, an earlier period of imitation–a 'trying on' of Western attitudes and beliefs as indicated through clothing–has been followed by a period of adjustment and negotiation in which a combination of non-indigenous and indigenous values are shaping contemporary Iñupiaq identity. Here, the operation of dress in reproducing the social order is seen in action. Iñupiaq-style clothing is being used in combination with Western dress in a creative synthesis that reinforces a new social order in Alaska—one where Iñupiaq people are claiming autonomy and rejecting an earlier coerced acceptance of Western values and practice. Arguing for dress as an embodied practice, Entwhistle (2000) points out that

the particular context that the dressed body operates in sets constraints on what is or is not appropriate to wear. The degree to which the dressed body can express itself is symbolic of that context. Thus, the continuing value of Iñupiaq clothing within the culture and its increasingly influential role in the political arena of indigenous rights reveals an emerging context where the Iñupiat are successfully asserting their rights to their bodies, lives and heritage.

## Glossary of Iñupiaq sewing and clothing terminology

**Sewing equipment**

**aglagaaq** - design, pattern, stripe
**atuŋaun/quagrulik** - glover's needle
**igluuralik** - fabric, material with a checkered pattern
**ikpiaġvik** - small sack to hold belongings, sewing kit, woman's handbag
**ikuun** - skin scraper
**iliktiġun/iliktiun** - pattern
**ivalu** - thread
**ivaluksraq** - sinew
**iḷiġniq/iḷiġniku** - leftover material, remnant; to have leftover material, remnant
**kaliku** - calico, fabric
**kalikuuraat** - scraps of cloth
**kiirautik** - crimpers
**kiluiyaun** - ripper
**kimaliq/kimaliuraq** - small woman's cutting knife
**kipitchiun** - dye
**miquun** - sewing machine
**mitqun/miqsrun** - needle
**mitqutiqaġvik** - sewing box, pin cushion
**qiuġvik** - cutting board for scraping hair from animal skin, for cutting leather
**qupak** - decorative fancy trim
**quvluayuuq** - fabric with striped pattern
**sakivrun** - two handed scraper for use on dried animal skin, hide
**sakivsivik** - long narrow piece of wood or root on which skin is scraped
**sakkuun** - skin scraper with long handle and metal tip
**sallisik** - pair of scissors
**sipaq** - zipper
**siḷḷiñ** - whetstone, knife sharpener
**tikiq** - thimble
**ulu/uluuraq** - woman's knife
**uluuraluk/uluurauraq/uluŋuuraq** - small sewing ulu
**uuktuun** - ruler, tape measure
**uyamik** - old sewing kit

**Sewing Activities/Descriptions**

aglagiit - to have a bad pattern of cloth fabric
aglagik - to have a nice pattern of cloth fabric
aglait - to have no design of cloth fabric
aglaktu - to have large designs of fabric
aglualaaq - to be brightly colored, have a bold pattern of fabric
amiġaq - certain kind of skin sewing stitch which makes a seam waterproof; to sew it using a waterproof stitch
atigiġruk - to wear a parka when it is not necessary
atikŧi - to make a parka
atikŧuliuq - to make cloth cover for parka
atikŧuuraliuq - to make parka style dress or shirt
iġvirriqi - to work with leather
ikuk - to scrape (animal skin); to tan skin by scraping it
iqaqŧi - to make waterproof sealskin knee-high boots for her/him; to make waterproof sealskin knee-high boots out of it
isivit - to be fully extended, flatten out
iḷiktiq - to cut material, skin which is to be sewn according to a pattern
kammi - to make boots for him/her; to make it (animal hide) into boot
kiiraq - to crimp it (boot sole)
kilu - seam, stitch
kiluaq - to rip, become undone (of seam); to rip its seam
kilugik - to sew well with even stitches, to be sewn well
kilugluk - to sew uneven or big stitches, to be sewn with uneven or big stitches
kiluiyaq - to come apart at the seams; to rip a seam
kiḷit - to cut (it = skin) with an ulu or knife
miquq - to sew (it)
miquutitaq - to use a sewing machine; to sew it on the sewing machine
nuvi - to thread it (a needle)
qiliq - to tie it into a knot
qitukŧi/qitugli - to become pliable, softer of skin; to soften, make it (skin) pliable by turning and twisting it
qitukkait - to be inflexible, stiff, not pliable
qitummak - to prepare it (leather) by softening and tanning
qiuġaq - to remove hair from skin; to cut her/his/its hair to the scalp or skin
qiuq - to thin fur

qupak - to trim or decorate it
quppiġaaliuq - to make a coat, jacket
sakkuutaq - to scrape it (animal skin) with a long handled scraper
sipaliq - to put zipper on a coat, jacket
siḷi - to sharpen it with a whetstone
uŋiraq - to ruffle, gather, pleat, pucker it (fabric or soft skin)
uluk - to rub or twist it (animal hide); to soften when tanning

**Garment Names**

aaqqatik/aatqatik/aitqatik - mitten
aiġun - cuff of a sleeve
aiñiq - pocket
akuq - fancy fringe of parka, skirt
akuqtuaġutilik - parka with white skin around bottom
aliqsik - socks, caribou fur socks
aluġun - sandal, shoe, dog booties
amaaġun/amaunnaq - parka for carrying baby on one's back
argaak - gloves
asiq - sleeve
atigi - parka
atigiġruaq - eider duck parka
atikłuk - cloth cover for parka (male or female)
atikłuuraq - parka style dress or shirt (female)
atikuluk/atikuluatchiak - man's dress boots with fringe, knee-high, made with dark and light furs in decorative pattern
atiqqak - high fur socks, boots that extend above the calf
atittuġun/kayuaġun/manusiññak - tusk shaped design strip on front and back of parka yoke
atituġutiligaaq - parka with tusk shaped design strips on front and back of yoke
atkun/sinaatkun - felt top on boots
atuŋak - hard boot sole (usually bearded seal or seal)
atulaak - slippers
atun - fur sock/ atutik -fur socks
iġvialigaak - slippers or moccasins with soft tanned leather soles
iŋaluk - rain gear made from bearded seal intestine
ikinġuraq - sole of fur sock
ipiaq - mitten string, drawstring for tall boots

**ipnalik/ipnaligaaq** - old style woman's parka with tail
**iqaqťak/iqaqťik** - pair of waterproof knee-high sealskin boots
**isiġvik** - parka ruff
**isiġvikpagaaq** - woman's sunburst ruff of wolf sewn around wolverine fur on bleached sealskin
**isiktuuk** - long winter boots made from caribou leg skins
**isiptaq/isipsaq/isivitaq** - stretched skin cut down the belly; anything stretched out and displayed like a polar bear skin rug
**iļupaaq** - inner fur clothing, lining, insulation, underwear
**kammak/kammiak** - hand made boots
**kammalaurak** - short fancy boots
**kavrauraq/kavriŋuraq** - peak of hood on woman's parka
**kiapiġuq** - vest
**kigmiġun** - a strip sewn between the body of the boot to the sole
**kigmiġutiksraq** - intermediate strip of animal hide between connecting strip and sole of boot
**kimmik** - heel
**kivluaq** - knee-high hairless, sealskin waterproof boot with bearded sealskin sole
**kuvlu** - thumb
**nalukatautik** - dehaired sealskin summer boots with strip-trim tops
**nasaq** - hood
**nasautaq** - hat
**natchiaġruk** - sealskin trousers
**piñiġaq** - short waterproof summer boots
**piñiq** - insole
**piļiaq** - handmade item
**pualuk** - trail mittens
**purruq** - hole worn in boot sole
**qaġlik/mamilik** - Eskimo waterproof boots
**qaqťiik/qaġlik** - fur breeches (fur in)
**qatiġnisi** - white cover for parka (for hunting)
**quguŋniq/ukpinniq/qugluniq** - hem; fold line on material or paper
**qulaaġun/qulipaq** - fur strip on top of boot
**quliksak** - caribou or reindeer skin pants (fur out)
**quppiġaaq** - non-traditional coat, jacket that opens in front
**qusuŋŋaq** - outer fur parka
siei - fur trim on bottom edge or cuffs of a parka or jacket
**siŋiq** - boot strap or lace

**tavsi** - belt
**timi** - body
**tuŋnaaq** - joiner
**tuttulik** - boots with caribou soles
**uŋiġvik** - top edge of fur boot where drawstring goes; drawstring casing
**uŋirviaġun** - leather strip between body and hard sole of boot
**ugrulik** - boots with bearded seal soles
**uliŋnaak** - fur trousers (extended below calf)
**ulitchuiḷak** - knee-high waterproof caribou or sealskin boots with fur inside
**utummak** - palm

**Animals/hides used for sewing**

amiq - animal hide, pelt, skin covering on boat or qayaq frame
amiku - remainder from cutting skin or hide
akuaġutit/akkut - fancy trim on bottom of parka
akuqtuaġun - white skin (often sheep) around bottom of parka
akuuraq - trim on bottom edge of parka
iġviaq - tanned leather
iġviaqsraq - hide to be tanned
ukuaq/ikuktaq - scraped skin
siñiksraq - part of fur which is stripped and used for parka trimming at bottom and cuffs
naluaq - sun bleached seal or bearded seal skin
kiiraak - crimped soles
kiŋmiġutiksraq - animal hide to be made into strips; connecting strip between body and sole of boot
kipitchiaq - dyed skin, especially dyed with red alder
amauligruaq - eider
qitummaktaq - soft tanned skin, leather
amaġuq - wolf
amaġupiaq - white, gray wolf
amaġuuraq - coyote
itiġiaqpak - mink
itiġiaq - weasel
tuttu - caribou
tuttuvak - moose
natchiq - seal
qayaġulik - ringed seal
qasigiaq - spotted seal
ugruk - bearded seal
nanuq - polar bear
qavvik - wolverine
qapvaitchiaq - marten
paɬuqtaq - beaver
pamiuqtuuq - otter
kivgaluk - muskrat
ukallisugruk - Alaska hare
ukalliq - snowshoe rabbit, varying hare
siksrikpak - hoary marmot

**siksrik** - ground squirrel
**tiġiganniaq/pisukkaaq** - fox
**kayuqtuq/kivviaq** - red fox
**qianġaq** - cross fox, blue fox
**qiġŋiqtaq** - black or silver fox
**immulivik** - domestic cow
**imnaiq** - Dall sheep, mountain sheep
**imnaiyaaq** - lamb
**qunŋiq** - reindeer
**aiviq** - walrus

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